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Year of the Adopted Family:  
Selected Folktales for the Seasons of Adoptee Personal and Cultural Identity

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Reading with a concentration in Storytelling

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by  
Rachel Hedman  
May 2014

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Dr. Joseph D. Sobol, Chair  
Dr. Delanna Reed  
Ms. Renee Lyons

Keywords: Adoption Folktales, Story Games, Sensemaking, Attachment, Cultural Adjustment,  
Identity

## ABSTRACT

Year of the Adopted Family:

Selected Folktales for the Seasons of Adoptee Personal and Cultural Identity

by

Rachel Hedman

In a study of the application of storytelling to adoptive family bonding, sensemaking, and cultural adjustment, I selected 12 world folktales for adoptive families to use as oral storytelling activities. I designed and facilitated a workshop for 7 adoptive families focusing on how to select, to learn, and to tell stories as well as how to play story-based games with their children. Each adult told 1 of the 12 folktales, played 1 or 2 of 37 games (12 traditional games, 25 story-based games), and shared reactions and interactions of family members. Using the term “story talk” to describe conversational byplay following the storytelling experiences, family members’ responses to interview questions were coded to interpret levels of sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment through the storytelling process. The parents also described the levels at which their chosen folktale helped adoptees to understand cultural and personal identity within the modern-day adoption process.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My husband Casey proposed marriage through telling a story. He is my “eternally ever after.” For this research project, he drove with me to Idaho, helped with the nursery in Utah, and gave enough kisses and hugs to see me through to the end. I send great applause to the two little boys who have been with us for many months through foster care. I explained the “Thesis Wall” upon which all my notes and transcriptions were taped. These boys dutifully guarded these notes. I also send much love to my official Story Buddies who spent time editing and commenting: Holly Robison, Carol Esterreicher, Julie Barnson, Jan C. Smith, Suzanne Hudson, and Joanna Huffaker. Regarding Joanna—she is the amazing artist who created all of the story images. Countless times people have complimented her work. I am in her debt. The award for “Most Patient” must go to Dr. Joseph D. Sobol, who, at any point could have given up on me. Instead he encouraged me to persevere. I am grateful for Dr. Delanna Reed and Ms. Renee Lyons for their support and guidance. I appreciate the donations from Wahooz Family Fun Zone, Boise Little Theatre, Boondocks, Roosters Restaurant. Additionally, I appreciate the kindness of A New Beginning Adoption Agency for the office space they provided in Idaho. I thank all the still-to-be-named family, friends, and mentors for the honor of knowing them and for the encouragement that bore fruit in the end.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*A wealthy woman wished to belong. She had riches enough to have anything in life...except children (retold from Wilhelm, 1996, "The Widow Who Gathered Sticks").*

Somewhere in a bustling home a mother pauses while reading this Maasai story "The Widow Who Gathered Sticks." The mother reads it again and determines to share the story in her own words with her adoptive family. Her 5-year-old girl who joined the family 2 years earlier wiggles into bed to await the bedtime story. The father smiles at the girl's mismatched pajama top and bottom complete with a bit of dried toothpaste below his daughter's lip. Their eyes and ears shift to the mother. Both father and daughter lean forward, absorbing a story from a different time and place, yet the story feels familiar. The next day the girl asks more about the Maasai and the family crowds around the computer to search the Internet. A week later the child blurts over the dinner table, "How far did that woman walk to that sycamore tree for children?" About a month later the mother glimpses her daughter oblivious of being watched reenacting the story. The story becomes a way for that family to express feelings ranging from pain to joy. The story unifies this family and inspires a language—a story talk involving imagery, symbols, and phrases. Without realizing it, personal narratives emerge.

A situation like the one described is greatly desirable, and although adoption folktales surround families like these, up until now no one has collected these stories and proclaimed, "Here, read these! Tell these!" Instead, these families stumble on their own, often relying on adoption picture books that lack the power of time-tested world folktales from the oral tradition. The cocreative nature of folktales in the telling preserves culture in a degree beyond the lone perspective found in cherished literary works like "Anne of Green Gables," "Heidi," and "Oliver



Twist.” Adoption, also a time-tested and natural experience amongst all cultures, becomes a choice for parents faced with the unfulfilled desire to have children. Even the most natural things can be painful. Death, part of the natural course of life, stuns the soul when it comes. Adoption starts with grief, loss, and a dying of the soul. Birth parents lose a child. A child loses parents. Adoptive parents lose control and the ability to have children.

Consider the Russian folktale “Ivan the Cow’s Son” (retold from Afanas’ev, 1975) as emblematic of how many present-day adoptive parents feel before a child comes into their life:

The queen stared at the fish with a golden wing. The king had told her to eat it and their wish to have children would come to pass.

“How is eating this fish any different from all the other ‘magical’ things I have consumed?”

The king scratched his beard and asked, “What harm is there in eating this fish?”

“There could be great harm,” the queen asserted. She held her husband’s bearded cheek in one hand. “For 10 years I have eaten, consumed, ingested, devoured, and swallowed whatever you placed before me without question. For 10 years I have cried, moaned, sorrowed, anguished, and grieved. By eating this fish, will I be filled with that last dose of despair from which there is no return? Can my heart take one more disappointment?”

Other folktales highlight common feelings of the adopted child such as this excerpt from the Cuban folktale “The Charcoal Woman’s Son” (retold from Bierhorst, 2002):

Sometimes the prince pulled his procession to one side of the path to allow the sackcloth pilgrims to pass with their bleeding feet marking their long journey to Havana. With the Feast of St. Lazarus and Dives about to commence, the pilgrims had more to celebrate than the prince.

“I feel like the rich man who was denied heaven by refusing to aide Lazarus. Even a poor man may know who his parents are,” sighed the prince.

I surveyed libraries for these adoption-themed folktales scattered in more than 200 sources. Then I performed as many of the stories as I could in my capacity as a professional storyteller. Not every story involving adoption qualified as an “adoption folktale,” a phrase I coined for the purpose. While adoptees appear as important characters in many folktales, a qualified adoption folktale needs to promote relationships with at least one or more of the following persons: birth parent(s), birth sibling(s), adoptive parent(s), or adoptive sibling(s). The presence of any of those listed parties allows a more familiar feel to the modern-day adoption life cycle. The stories gave me comfort as my husband and I wished for children. Instead of saying hard words such as, “I feel discouraged” or “We have done all that we can,” I had only to share that Russian story of the king and queen who could not have children for 10 years.

My husband and I have been married for 12 years. Over a year ago we became licensed foster parents and two little boys joined our home. The boys feel attached to these adoption folktales, often asking me to share them again in the car, at the bedside, or in the grocery store. They struggle and adapt to the idea of having two moms—a birth mom and a foster mom. They need stories that help them to know that others have experienced these thoughts—even characters from folktales. They latch onto what is familiar in their lives and recognize differences too. Seeing this connection for my boys tells me that other people—children and adults—can benefit from hearing and having access to these adoption folktales as tools that can evoke personal narratives.

## **Statement of Purpose**

The premises of this study include the observation that adoption folktales induce interactions and story talk, the conversations and experiences that arise from listening to stories and being influenced by them. The images, phrases, and plotlines from these stories serve as “sensemaking” tools that evoke personal narratives (Weick, 1995). If the adoptee’s culture differs from that of the parents, the adoption folktales can potentially enhance cultural identity. These stories teach the values of the adoptee’s heritage and pique the child’s potential to learn beyond what the stories express. Besides exploring the culture-of-origin, many listening adoptees think of their own lives and how the similarities and the differences compare to their personal adoptee identity and the way that they feel about being adopted. Therefore, the research question I want to answer through this study is: What can story talk accomplish to shape personal and cultural identity among adoptee children and build closer bonds with adoptive parents? In addition, I studied the following subquestions: How are sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment demonstrated through story talk? What are the responses of parents using story talk? What evaluation methods can storytellers use to help adoptive families reflect on issues of personal and cultural identity?

The stories chosen for adoptive families need to accomplish more than the purpose of preserving a cultural identity; they need to be stories that uphold the modern-day adoptive family identity. Professional storytellers develop large repertoires in the attempt to tell the right story for the right audience at the right time. “Rightness” or “wrongness” of stories changes with time, being subjective to each listener’s preferences and immediate situations. Life experiences determine which “right” stories linger and which “wrong” ones fade from memory. With hundreds of thousands of adoptees in the world, what are those “right” adoption folktales?

Parents, with other obligations to fulfill, must make efficient decisions regarding the stories shared with their children. They often rely on outside sources such as the word-of-mouth of other adoptive parents, experts, and caseworkers in the adoption field or the local librarian. The parents strive to find high-quality content that entertains while enhancing emotional wellbeing for their children. Storytellers, authors, and publishers often make the decisions for the parents. I aim to involve parents in the decision-making process.

The story games emerged as I wondered about the storytelling background of the participants. Storytelling surrounds my life on a daily basis, so telling stories during bedtime excites me. Games give a chance for parents to practice expressing themselves in silly yet creative ways that could translate into the storytelling experience with their children who already play games constantly with neighborhood kids, schoolmates, and siblings. Almost all of my 37 games avoid the familiar tools such as boards, cards, and dice. Thus, families only need each other to succeed in playing the games. This makes the games as well as the stories as being more accessible and doable for families of all economic and social backgrounds.

As a review, this study's premises involve the observation that adoption folktales evoke story talk. These folktales need to support the ability for the development of both a personal adoptee identity and a cultural identity. By finding the right criteria to select these stories, these adoption folktales will feel more "right" for professional storytellers and adoptive families alike. Adding to that feeling of "rightness," the story games provide a way to ease adoptive parents into this storytelling and game playing experience.

### **Justification**

Any time I have said the phrase "adoption folktale" to people, I hear "oooh, tell me more." The justification for this study covers the following: (1) lack of adoption-themed plotlines for

professional storytellers to use; (2) absence of published collections of adoption folktales; (3) growing population of adoptees, (4) adding another sensemaking tool for adoptive families, and (5) synergistic effects combining adoption folktales with story games. The research is of primary interest to the storytelling community and to anyone involved with the adoption process, including but not limited to adoptive couples, birth parents, caseworkers, or anyone who has been adopted. I will first start with my experience as a professional storyteller.

When I share adoption folktales at an elementary school, this scene almost always occurs with few variations with the dialogue: some of the students linger with huge smiles on their faces, walk up to me, and look as if they would give hugs, proclaiming, “Thank you! I am adopted, too.” Depending on each school’s audience, sometimes the students follow through on those hugs. Yet, the most consistent part of that scene has been the adoptees saying, “I am adopted, too.” Whether it is for one or for many audience members, storytellers need access to adoption-themed plotlines in order to connect to these students. The storyteller impacts a listener more when the stories reflect a modern-day adoption process than a story that simply features an orphan. The story needs to place importance on the birth parent(s), adoptive parent(s), or birth and adoptive sibling(s) for children to recognize faster the similarities to their own lives. Thus, professional storytellers need better methods of selecting, evaluating, and performing folktales with adoption-themed plotlines. In addition, tellers need to be sensitive to the audience while celebrating another aspect of family life.

Besides assisting professional storytellers, the second reason for this study is that these adoption folktales help adoptive families actually hold a published collection of folktales in their hands. As of yet, there are no published collections of adoption folktales. I expected to find at least one published work. Instead, I found that many books featuring folktales from around the

world highlight husband-wife, parent-child, and sibling relationships. Folktales featuring adoptive relationships deserve a more visible role in published works of collected folktales. The stories are scattered rather than being designated in categories or topics within volumes devoted specifically to them. There are adoption picture books, but these are usually original works as opposed to storylines that have survived hundreds or even thousands of years in oral tradition. Despite orphans and adoptees making regular appearances in world folktales such as “Dick Whittington and his Cat,” “Thumbelina,” “Rapunzel,” and “Moses,” the adventure or moral takes precedence for publishers. To be more useful to adoptive families the actual adoption cycle (Morris, 1999) must take precedence.

Authors and storytellers intent on connecting to a growing population of adoptees must feature “adoption” as a theme in their works (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012). This leads to the third reason for this study of a growing adoptee population. Civil servants on state and federal levels realized the needs of their constituents in regards to recognizing adoptive families. Eventually, President Reagan signed a proclamation to recognize a National Adoption Week in 1984. President Clinton expanded and signed a new proclamation dedicating a National Adoption Month each November starting in 1995. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013), over 100,000 children in the United States currently await adoption. Add this number to the nation’s population of adoptees: 677,000 adopted through private domestic adoptions; 661,000 adopted through foster care; 444,000 adopted through international adoptions outside the United States (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012).

From these big population numbers, I now narrow my focus to the fourth reason for collecting adoption stories: developing identity through sensemaking among individual families. Weick (1995) already recognized stories as an important part of creating shared meanings

through sensemaking. Between live performance and literature, adoptive couples could have more ways to help their child reflect on their own experiences as another sensemaking function for healthy and healing family dynamics. Most importantly, these participating parents for this study, as well as future participating parents, will be given the power to choose significant stories from their adoptive child's cultural background while simultaneously addressing the universal feelings and the life cycle found within the adoption process. The National Survey for Adoptive Parents (2007) stated that the majority of adoptive parents already read stories to their children on a daily basis. This study involving adoption folktales adds repertoires for these parents, especially as I will be publishing these adoption folktales along with the story games.

The fifth reason for doing this research is that stories and games provide synergistic effects for parents and community leaders. Stories and games allow the effects to last longer and develop into subtle home-based conversations that allude to personal feelings arising from the adoption process. When asked to tell stories for an hour at a Family Shelter, I asked if I could have half the time dedicated to storytelling while the other half focused on playing storytelling games. The organizers agreed. By the end of that session, children ranging from ages 5 to 12 expressed the wish to tell their own stories. At other venues where I tell only stories, audience members thank me for the stories though I have noticed that when I present stories and games, I witness a surge of would-be storytellers awaiting a listening ear. Causing synergistic effects, stories and games further verify the need to have published resources featuring both adoption folktales and games.

These five main points to justify this study validate the importance of this study. With a lack of adoption-themed plotlines, professional storytellers are unable to connect with their audiences as deeply. The absence of published collections of adoption folktales can be frustrating

for adoptive families looking for several applicable stories in one place. Meanwhile, the population of adoptees expands. These adoption folktales induce story talk in the homes and provide another sensemaking tool for adoptive families. The combination of story games enhances the effectiveness of the adoption folktales. I now explain some key terms as another means of being effective.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

I developed the definitions that best fit this study. My terms are under either “adoption” or “storytelling” categories. For the adoption terms I synthesized all of the definitions with one exception being “sensemaking” coined by Weick (1995). “Attachment” became the most difficult term to define as to this day scholars debate the differences between “attachment” and “bonding.” I discovered that “security” and “love” are the two elements agreed by most scholars and used that in my final definition for this study (Frude & Killick, 2011; Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler & Esau, 2007; Keefer & Schooler, 2000). “Cultural adjustment” became a term influenced by the cultural socialization studies and the connections to personal adoptee identity and cultural identity (Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010). As for the storytelling terms, I defined “performance storytelling” from personal experience in the art. I coined the phrases “adoption folktale,” “story talk,” and “story game.”

### **Adoption Terms**

1. Adoptive Family—A constitutive definition would be: one or more parents as well as one or more adopted children whose status as an adoptive family is legally finalized by the court.
2. Placement—Process of a birth mother placing her child with the adoptive parent(s), and then adoptive parent(s) executing legal documents allowing physical custody of the child.
3. Adoption Process—The sequence of events that are part of adoption:



- a. Deciding—Birthparents Decision to Place a Child and Adoptive Parents Pursue Adoption
  - b. Waiting—Emotional and Physical Preparation for Birthparents and Adoptive Parents
  - c. Matching and Attaching—Birthparents Place with Adoptive Parents and Post Adoption Connection with Adoptee and Adoptive Parents
  - d. Developing—Adoptive Parents Share Adoptee’s Story for Self-Identity and Possible Cultural Identity if Adoptee’s Culture Differs from Adoptive Parents’ Culture
  - e. 4. Adoptee Identity—Self-image influenced by knowledge of birth parents, feelings of being adopted in the present, and views of what being adopted will mean in the future.
5. Cultural Identity—Self-image influenced by knowledge of past ancestry, feelings of ethnicity in the present, and views of what that ethnicity will mean in the future.
6. Cultural Socialization—Practices and activities that adoptive parents do, provide, or introduce to their adopted children to connect with their culture-of-origin.
7. Cultural Adjustment—Ability to blend one or more cultures in a family to create a new identity.
8. Sensemaking—Placing meaning on events, such as experienced through storytelling moments, in order to promote the well-being of the family (coined by Weick, 1995).
9. Attachment—Secure and loving relationship developed from the quality of time spent together between parent and child.

### **Storytelling Terms**

- 1. Performance Storytelling—Planned and scheduled oral and interactive, cocreative narrative experience involving an intentional storyteller and willing, participating listeners.
- 2. Adoption Folktale—A story developed through the oral tradition that preserves the folklore of a particular country or culture and that involves adoption-themed plotlines.

3. Story Talk—Conversations and experiences that arise from listening to and being influenced by stories. These conversations stem from listener's need to make a personal connection to the stories and/or to develop a relationship with the storyteller and other listeners, if any.
4. Story Game—A game developed with the intent to create a partial or full narrative as a result of playing it.

### **Limitations**

I chose the 12 selected adoption folktales based on certain criteria and presented them in a workshop format with nine adoptive parents. My research was limited to what I could uncover with nine adoptive parents within the two evaluated workshops. My findings apply only to these particular situations. The adoptive parents chose whatever stories and games they deemed best to share with their adopted children. My access to contact information of adoptive families was restricted due to privacy laws, even though I was an approved potential adoptive parent and a licensed foster parent at the time. Other families will experience the adoption folktales and games beyond this project and will generate even more adaptations.

I avoided interpreting and explaining archetypes and symbols found within the selected stories because doing so would risk delving into psychological fields outside my expertise. I used only the stories and games that helped me discover any relationship to families' sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment.

I relied on the parents' memories of the storytelling and game-playing effects. From the actual interviews, background stories of the adoptive families served only to illuminate and substantiate the effectiveness of the folktales and games.

## **Methodology**

### **Theoretical Framework**

This is an applied storytelling project in which I identified and analyzed a subgenre of international folktales with a common theme of adoption and used a selection from this subgenre to create a workshop for adoptive families, evaluating the results through an action research methodology. The project is informed by my own life experiences as a storyteller, foster parent, and potential adoptive parent. I found adoption folktales, determined workshop agenda and objectives, and developed interview questions. The action-reflection cycle consists of a statement of a problem, imagination of a solution, implementation of a solution, evaluation of the solution, and modification of practice in light of evaluation (McNiff, 2002). Two pilot programs and two evaluated workshops allowed me to improve the presentation and to discover better ways of presenting adoption folktales with parents.

This action research incorporated my observations and impressions when I researched and gathered adoption folktales, presented pilot workshops, evaluated those workshops for the adoptive families, and read the transcribed interviews. As a qualitative study, I sought feedback from adoptive parents and fellow storytellers regarding their experiences in order to add to or to refine my views related to printed workshop handouts representing the oral presentations. Each workshop changed in my efforts toward more effective performances and applications of the stories with the target audiences. I strove to achieve a more efficient use of adoptive families' time and to make the adoption stories stronger as parenting tools.

I categorized the interviewees' responses into positive or negative examples for sensemaking (Weick, 1995), attachment (Frude & Killick, 2011; Grotevant et al., 2007; Keefer & Schooler, 2000), and cultural adjustment (Vonk et al., 2010). I organized and coded the data

according to the themes found in the interviewees' transcriptions. The parents' experiences with the stories and games often led to family discussions and conversations dubbed as "story talk."

As for the sequence of this study, I first selected the adoption folktales, conducted the two pilot programs making adjustments each time, and finally presented the two evaluated workshops with additional adjustments. I start with the selection and continue from there.

I selected 12 out of many qualifying adoption folktales to rotate into my storytelling repertoire. Two stories from each of the six major continents were represented with an exception for Australia. I chose New Zealand to count as part of the Australia and Oceania region. The selected number also provided enough choices for adoptive parents to choose, prepare, and tell one preferred story to their children without feeling overwhelmed.

The first pilot program changed how I collected information for the evaluated workshops. The parents originally sent weekly emails for 8 weeks without any follow-up telephone interviews. The written responses allowed the parents to thoughtfully craft their answers and not have to dedicate 40 minutes to 2 hours beyond the workshop for interviews. However, I was dissatisfied with the overall amount shared by these parents. I wanted to ask follow-up questions by telephone to clarify or delve deeper in the story talk moments. Instead, I had to be limited to their written responses. When I switched to telephone interviews for the evaluated workshops, I obtained 2 to 10 times the number of responses with the ability to instantly ask clarifying questions.

Besides data gathering, the first pilot program inspired me to delve into ready-to-tell stories. Originally, I had parents work with one story over the course of 8 weeks with a focus each week on characters, on emotions within the story, and on moving the plot forward. Although common practice for professional storytellers is to develop one story for weeks,

months, or years, I needed techniques that an adoptive parent—and not a potential adoptive parent who happened to be a storyteller—could use on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis in the home. For the first and second evaluated workshops, parents told a story with a partner immediately after story-boarding. Thus, the parents understood the small yet critical amount of preparation required when they returned home to story-board, practice, and tell a story.

At first the parents were only going to story-board and tell a story. After the first pilot program, the second pilot program and the two evaluated workshops included story games. Although the parents responded to the stories positively in the first pilot program, I created a more spontaneous story-based play that required no preparation except for knowing the rules to the game. I designed three to four games to complement each of the 12 selected stories. Such activities provided a way for parents to ease into the storytelling experience and increase the chance of story talk within the areas of sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment. After the workshops, the parents needed to develop an “I can do this” attitude. I modeled everything I expected the parents to do in their own homes. By performing the stories at the beginning, I indirectly shared techniques and tips on how to tell a story without reviewing a checklist such as “use voices to distinguish between characters” or “slow down for your last lines in the story to indicate to the audience you are ending.” I allowed more workshop time for them to become comfortable with the story-boarding process and with telling the story shortly after preparing it. I emphasized the idea that parents could experiment in telling a story rather than developing a perfect delivery. I emphasized that mistakes often can make the experience more enjoyable. In fact, I expected to make my own mistakes while identifying the strengths of the adoption folktale selection process, the evaluation of the stories and games, and the presentation of the workshops through action research. In the next section, I introduce these participants.

## **Subjects**

The two evaluated workshops involved seven adoptive families. I gave each participant a pseudonym: Nancy (age 58, adoption social worker); David (age 57); Kathleen (age 52, adoption operations manager); Lori (age 40); Whitney (age 39); Jason and Julie (age 33 and age 34 respectively); Henry and Allison (both age 33, husband as adoption agency director). Two of the families came from Idaho and five families came from Utah. The adults ranged in age from 33 to 62-two years old with four families being from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), one family being Catholic, one family being Protestant, and one family claiming none and all religions. Three of the adults had occupations within an adoption agency: two directors of social work representing adoptions and counseling, and an operations manager. I welcomed these specialized individuals because they had an already established interest in finding out if these adoption folktales would work in their fields as well as in their personal lives. Their experiences with birth parents and adoptive parents bridged the gap otherwise created within the typical modern-day adoption process.

A New Beginning Adoption Agency sponsored and announced the first evaluated workshop to their contacts in Idaho through fliers and email while embRACE, a local trans-cultural adoption support group, shared information through its fall newsletter and private Facebook group. Although I received RSVPs from seven different adoptive families, only two adults came. I welcomed a 12-year-old to join her mom despite the focus being on adoptive parents, especially because the daughter expressed excitement and needed to be in the building while her mother attended. This idea developed into conducting the Utah workshop as a Family Night for anyone in an adoptive family with children aged 5 to 18. This way, the families practiced as a group—not parents only—before I asked them to story-board, tell a story, and play

at least two games. Anyone younger than age 5 attended the free nursery. One of the attending ladies mentioned that their adoptive families regularly RSVP and few actually attend for most adoption events.

For the Utah evaluated workshop, different private domestic and international adoption agencies such as Wasatch International Adoptions, West Sands Adoptions, and Premier Adoption announced the workshops through their email lists to their adoptive couples. The Layton Adoption Group posted the flier and information on its blog. As many people adopt through foster care, the Division of Children and Family Services in the Davis County area announced the workshop through its foster family email list. Some people learned through word-of-mouth of coworkers and storytelling friends. Seven adoptive families came, with two families using the free nursery for the children younger than 5 years of age.

I appreciated all of the people who spread the word, because agencies guard these lists of adoptive families for privacy reasons. Thus, I had to rely on a convenience sampling, people available at the time of the study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2007). I trusted these adoption organizations to do their best to pass on the message. Being a convenience sampling, the participants had two main motives: curiosity as to what storytelling could do for their families, or desire to add more skills to a storytelling tradition already found in the home.

Anyone attending the two evaluated workshops received a consent form as part of the workshop binder. The workshops officially started when everyone had turned in a signed consent form that said that each person acknowledged reading the form in full. The participants understood that they could still withdraw at any time during the study. They agreed to be videotaped during the workshop and then audio recorded for the follow-up telephone interviews a week later. They also stated that all questions had been answered about the study. Most

importantly, the adoptive parents gave permission for their children to participate in the study. Due to the parents being expected to tell a story and play one to two games with their family, the parents agreed that they would share responses to the experience from all of the family members.

I gathered email addresses from the participants and arranged when to conduct the telephone interviews. The participants provided the best telephone number to call. I maintained privacy of all participants by changing first names, deleting last names, and avoiding identifying information. With these confidential practices in place, I could prepare for the interview with these participants.

### **Interview Protocol**

I conducted structured and directive interviews, asking everyone the same questions unless the questions were not applicable to the participants' families. The interviewees received all 10 interview questions in the tabbed "Follow-up" section of the workshop binders (See Appendix B for interview questions.). I aimed for thoughtful answers from the participants about the overall experience. I dedicated time during workshops to clarify expectations for the follow-up telephone interviews and I encouraged the parents to read the questions before our scheduled chats. I wanted the parents to read the questions ahead of time so they could focus their attention on choosing, preparing, and telling their adoption folktales to their families. I preferred the participants to reflect on and off about the questions for a week or two rather than receive short and panicked answers.

Besides the binder including the interview questions, I also had a tab for the consent form that explained that the interviews would last roughly 30 minutes to 1 hour. Everyone was aware of this fact due to the required reading and signing of the consent form before we started the workshop. The parents recognized the courtesy of being given the questions and expectations



and they agreed to give thoughtful feedback. All but one of the interviewees had the binder in front of them as we talked. I jumped into the questions with little or no small talk as these people already had spent one-and-a-half hours with me during a workshop. Besides, most interviewees had children at home and relied on my efficient use of time.

About 1 to 2 weeks after each workshop, all the participants found a quiet room for the interviews. During three of the interviews, I had to play a movie for my two boys to watch while my husband was at work. Other times my husband took the boys to the park or friends invited the boys encouraging them to play with their children. I held separate interviews for Jason and Julie as well as for Henry and Allison though many of their answers confirmed or added to their spouses' details. Had I interviewed them each as couples, I feared that one spouse would talk more than the other. Instead, I treated these couples as individuals who had another perspective to share. Hearing from each spouse also allowed me to see a more complete picture of the overall storytelling and game-playing experience.

I delved into the backgrounds of each of the adoptive families. The first five interview questions eased the parents into the structured format of the interview. Sometimes the background information expanded upon the interviewees' answers later on about the story and game reactions. For example, if certain adoptees reacted to a story differently than this child's adoptive or biological siblings, the background filled in the blanks with reasons for that response.

Of the seven adoptive families, five families had more than one adopted child. During the interview, I repeated the adoption background questions as well as the cultural identity and adoptee identity questions for each adopted child. I skipped the cultural identity questions for each of the two families who shared the same culture as their adoptive child. I saw cultural identity being more crucial for adoptees who were of different ethnicity than the adoptive

parents. All adoptees need to discover for themselves how to view their ethnicity. Although their adoptive parents would attempt to empathize, these adoptive parents would only be able to support through words and not through actual experiences of living as one from that ethnicity.

The last five questions reflected the family's experience and reactions to the stories and games, the main purpose of this work. These parents explained in the interview the extent to which their chosen folktale and game(s) helped adoptees understand cultural and adoptee identity within the modern-day adoption process. The sixth question was "What did your adopted child like most about the (country/tribe) folktale? Why?" while the seventh question was "What cultural game/activity did your adopted child like most? Why?" The sixth and seventh questions had a "what" and "why" component so that the parents could give short answers and then expand in a storied format. If I felt that too few details were shared, then I added specific "tell me more..." phrases to probe for any area needing clarification. The "tell me more..." phrase allowed for moments to emerge that I would not have thought to ask or would not be answered by the original questions.

The eighth question was "What were the strengths of the "Year of the Adopted Family" performance/workshop? Weaknesses?" This question aimed for the interviewees to answer what they thought were strengths first so they could feel more open to share any negatives of the experience rather than glaze or ignore these points. I welcomed any areas of improvement that the parents voiced to be addressed.

The ninth question was "How adaptable, if at all, are using folktales—regardless of origin—to teach: a. Cultural identity? Why? b. Adoptee identity? Why?" This question furthered the discussion of strengths and weaknesses by asking about the adaptability of adoption folktales for cultural and adoptee identity. The parents gave more thoughtful answers due to already

applying cultural and adoptee identity with their families during the background section of the interview.

The 10th question was “Before the ‘Year of the Adopted Family’ workshop, what was your experience with storytelling? In 1 year, how do you see storytelling playing a role in your adoptive family, if at all? Five years? Ten years?” This question checked on the background each family had with storytelling. More experience with the art might be expected to change the family’s reactions to the adoption folktales. The follow-up questions within question 10 checked on the potential for the family to develop more, less, or the same traditions involving storytelling over the course of 1, 5, and 10 years. Was this just a “hit-and-run” experience for them or something more long-lasting? Would the couples be honest or tell me, a storyteller, what I wanted to hear? By ending with “any further comments about this experience,” I encouraged the parents to share any burning thoughts, whether to add to the previous discussion or brainstorming related ideas. The parents could request information regarding what would happen at this point of the project. Half of the parents commented “none” because the other questions covered what they had to say.

In review, I organized a structured and directive interviewing process. The parents signed the consent forms and agreed to the expectations. Everyone made arrangements to find a room with little to no noise for our telephone interviews. I treated each interviewee as an individual with valuable insight. The first five questions of the interview delved into background information. I asked questions as they applied to each family. Later, I discovered that some answers given during the background questions clarified the answers from the last five questions that focused on the storytelling and game experiences. Each interviewee had a chance to share comments beyond the questions asked. I now describe the data collection process.

## Data Collection

My data came from two main sources: the adoption folktales and the transcribed adoptive parent interviews. I read more than 200 books over the course of 2 years, looking for the stories that had adoption plotlines. I did not initially concern myself with what countries or areas these stories originated from because I wanted to understand what an average reader—albeit a genre-specific reader—could find on the subject while perusing the Dewey decimal 398.2 section of the library. None of the books had “adoption” as a heading, neither in the table of contents nor in the index. If the story began with a phrase like “There once was a king and a queen who wanted children...” or “A peasant couple took care of their land with great care, but no sound of a child could be heard...,” then the story had potential. Sometimes the barrenness expressed at the start of the story led to a biological birth—miraculous though still biological—and I had to move on to another story. I avoided stories where animals, changelings, or a mixture of the two became adopted. When the list of qualified adoption folktales lengthened, I had nearly two adoption folktales from each of the six major continents. The search focused on completing this pattern. Subsequently, I exchanged the “Australia continent” to the “Australia and Oceania region.”

The Aarne-Thompson tale type index (MacDonald & Strum, 1982), with most of its attention on European folktales, lacked the comprehensive worldwide view I required for selecting adoption folktales. Nevertheless, the index illuminated how adoption appeared amongst the categories with the most possibilities from section T “Sex” and subcategory “Conception and birth” T500-T599, as well as “Care of children” T600-T699. Furthermore, the classification system alluded to stories from other countries with the same motifs, especially as my search evolved into finding two adoption folktales in each of the six major continents with my adaptation for Australia. *The Storyteller’s Sourcebook* by MacDonald and Strum (1982) provided

a user-friendly approach to the Aarne-Thompson classification that contains a subject index including the terms abandonment, adoption, baby, birth, child, children, conception, pregnancy, and pregnant. The geographical index expanded reading possibilities in its listing folktale books by continents and ethnic groups.

I learned more about how the authors gathered these folktales to assist in my own gathering by consulting the source notes in the backs of books and following up on the recommended readings and bibliographies. Most of these notes also delved into cultural symbols and significance for each folktale featured. I preferred sources with thorough notes, such as the Pantheon World Folktale Library (Afanas'ev, 1975; Bierhorst, 2002). As for my favorite collectors of tales, I admired books by: Margaret Read MacDonald, Jane Yolen, Diane Wolkstein, Judy Sierra, Meliss Bunce, Joanna Cole, John Bierhorst, among many others. Folktale collections varied in source notes dependent on the publishing company and the revised edition year. Some editions gave thorough notes on the gathering of the folktales, while other editions only shared the folktales. I avoided pictures books that highlighted one folktale unless searching for other versions of already selected adoption folktales.

Besides the types of collections and books found, I considered the countries represented by these folktales. According to the 2007 National Survey for Adoptive Parents, 4 out of 10 children are from a different race, culture, or ethnicity than the adoptive parents (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012; Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009). After surveying over 200 worldwide published collections of traditional tales, I selected two stories each from North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Australia and Oceania region. Three of the stories come from the top 20 placement countries for adoptive parents in the United States [see Appendix G]. A fourth story from the Maasai tribe came from one country south of

Ethiopia, the highest ranked country for placement in Africa. I chose all 12 folktales for the engaging plotlines rather than for international adoption placement statistics.

With the stories gathered and chosen, I conducted the workshops and interviews with adoptive parents. Starting with seven adoptive families, I tested and selected 12 world adoption folktales as well as 37 story games with three to four games connected to each of the 12 stories. I used a RadioShack ETV Model 43-127 digital voice telephone recorder for the interviews conducted with participants from the evaluated workshops. I gave the interviewees the choice to use either landline or cell phones. I could have asked parents to videotape the experience to avoid selective memory or slanting the outcome in a more positive way. I determined that videotaping would be too complicated to introduce, considering my timeframe for this study. The parents might not have had access to cameras. Other people would have become too nervous to act naturally.

Each adult participant told one of the 12 folktales, played one to two of the 37 games (12 traditional games, 25 story-based games), and shared reactions of family members through the interview. The children who heard the stories told by their parents were mainly 5 to 6-year-olds and extended to teenagers and even adoptees who have had families of their own.

One week to 2 ½ weeks after the workshop, I conducted a 40 minute to 2 hour telephone interview using the questions found in Appendix B. Some random technological issues occurred that caused two recorded interviews to be accidentally overwritten and two more of the interviews to have a radio frequency in the background discovered only while transcribing. The people concerned gave me permission to use my notes and add their comments so their views could still be represented. Kathleen's and Lori's predictions for the role of storytelling in 1 year, 5 years, and 10 years became garbled when transcribing. The other five interviews were

transcribed and emailed to the respondents. All participants validated the results after offering minor additions or deletions to clarify points. With these approved transcriptions, I prepared to analyze the responses.

### **Data Analysis**

I discovered and coded the nine adoptive parents' interviews through the categories of sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment. I chose those three categories based on readings of studies mostly influenced by the work by Weick (1995) and Vonk et al. (2010). My sensemaking category originated from Weick's (1995) sensemaking as the ability to develop meanings from shared events that could unify families. I saw this "unity" as a cultivation factor for "story talk." Thus, I needed to evaluate the interviewees' responses for sensemaking. My attachment category was partially influenced by another study based on Weick's work. This study stated that a shared event would likely assist families develop stronger identities, especially during moments of transitions (Fiese et al., 2001). I interpreted one of these transitions to be the attachment time between adoptive parents and adoptees. I reasoned that these "stronger identities" included personal adoptee identities and cultural identities. To complete the conditions of the attachment category, Vonk et al.'s (2010) study developed with the main goal of finding what cultural socialization activities would lead to stronger parent-child attachment (2010). In the adoption world, attachment is one of the ultimate goals between adoptive parents and adoptees (Bramlett & Radel, 2010; Gilpin & Murphy, 2008; Goffman, 1986; Frude & Killick, 2011). Finally, my cultural adjustment category developed mostly from Vonk's cultural socialization study. One of Vonk et al.'s (2010) goals was for adoptive parents to help their adoptees achieve cultural adjustment to then inform their outlook of their identities. Dunbar

labeled four types of adoptee identities that provided vocabulary to further discussion about cultural adjustment (Grotevant et al., 2007).

With the categories of sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment clarified for this study, I read through the transcribed interviews. I mapped phrases and words that matched the definitions and studies as noted in the Review of the Literature. I next go through each category, starting with sensemaking.

Through the coding process, I identified four subcategories to sensemaking: (1) meaning from ideologies; (2) meaning from surrounding culture; (3) meaning-making activities such as story preparation or changing rules or structure to adapt better for the family; and (4) interpretations that engage family discussions. The first subcategory, ideologies, revealed that parents questioned the story selection process and noticed the graphic nature of the stories. The second subcategory, surrounding culture, showed that parents consider current family situations—such as history of abuse—before choosing stories to share with their children. I also found a parent who credited a past personal religious experience that influenced what story she chose to tell. The third subcategory, meaning-making activities, focused primarily on the story preparation (such as story-boarding, outlining, and practicing). Some families changed the ending of stories to better reflect their family's situation. As for games, one parent indicated that the rules had to be changed to allow all family members to succeed in linking ideas to form a cohesive story. The fourth subcategory, interpretations, became noticeable within parents' transcribed interviews whenever they used the words “discussed” or “talked about”. The families gathered to share thoughts before, during, or after the storytelling and game playing experience. These personal connections evoked a form of narrative also dubbed “story talk”: conversations and experiences that arise from listening to and being influenced by the stories.



Attachment, the level of security and love developed from quality time spent together, branched into the following subcategories: (1) security felt by the parents and children to tell stories and play games; (2) quality versus quantity of time spent together; (3) contribution to child development; and (4) the extent to which the parent became an aware and adaptable ideal attachment figure. The greatest number of comments from parents came from the quality of time and how the time elapsed to the point that they had to stop to move along with other family affairs, or that one or more family members requested to repeat the experience. Some families had already repeated the playing of certain games one to three times before the interviews. This allowed the parents to more easily recall the story talk and overall experience.

Cultural adjustment branched into the following subcategories: (1) personal adoption culture and (2) ethnic culture. The families mentioned motivation for the adoptees to explore their adoption background and/or the ethnic origins. All the parents emphasized the adoption culture. The parents shared their children's curiosity about the birth parents including lack of information about birth parents and the maintenance of links such as visits or documents about birth parents. Parents led discussions about birth parents' origins and the general view of adoption versus the reality of living as an adoptive family.

When analyzing the adoptive parents' interviews, I found that responses varied in details and reactions to the stories and games. I specifically avoided saying, "Discuss these stories and games." I simply instructed each adoptive parent to story-board one story, tell one story, and play two games. Any discussions or conversations found within the interviews would be natural and would reflect how that specific adoptive family wished to use the stories and games. Listening to and reading the transcribed interviews already suggested labels and categories that became confirmed after the analysis (see Chapter 4).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of literature focuses on identity formation in adopted children as well as storytelling and the family. I explain an overview of the types of studies found within each of these two areas starting with identity formation. Until the year 2007, few studies focused on adoptive families. Dunbar's (Grotevant et al., 2007) classification of four types of adoptee identities shows that all four types are considered healthy and expected within the adoption cycle. After Dunbar's categories, I share some transracial and international adoption statistics from the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP), announced as the "first-ever large scale nationally representative population survey regarding adopted children across adoption types" (Bramlett & Radel, 2010, p. 147). The Adoption Quarterly Journal issues from 2009 to 2012 are still exploring the data collected from that NSAP Survey, with most of these articles in the special double-sized July-December 2010 publication (Draft Call for Papers, 2009; Bramlett & Radel, 2010; Radel & Bramlett, 2010; Malm & Welti, 2010; Vandivere & McKlindon, 2010; Vonk et al., 2010). The possibilities of understanding adoptee and cultural identification are at our fingertips as an outcome of this survey. In addition, Vonk et al.'s group report storytelling as the most popular cultural socialization out of nine activities. Vonk et al.'s findings precede smaller sample-sized studies that look into homes with more than one culture in the home and the relationship to cultural identity.

As for storytelling and the family, Weick (1995) links "sensemaking" with the storytelling art itself. Sensemaking—or "the negotiation of memories"—acts as a meaning-making tool critical to development of identity. This process could be applied to anyone within the adoption process, to include, but not limited to, adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents (Gilpin &

Murphy, 2008; Goffman, 1986; Weick, 1995). Frude and Killick (2007) as well as other studies share observations about parent-storyteller and child-listener roles and the relationship with Bowlby's Attachment Theory (Fiese & Sameroff, as cited in Fiese et al., 2001; Keefer & Schooler, 2000). Finally, other studies set guidelines of how parents can be better tellers and use folktales as cultural teaching tools much like teachers in the classrooms (Akpinar & Ozturk, 2009; Virtue, 2007). Those teaching moments allow listener-adoptees to reflect on cultural identity as well as increasing attachment between parent and child.

### **Identity Formation in Adopted Children**

Key research on identity formation in adopted children was revealed in study by Dunbar (Grotevant et al., 2007). Dunbar and associates with the Minnesota-Texas Adoption Research Project interviewed 145 adolescents of same-race parents about their adoptee identities and discovered four major categories:

- Unexamined identity, thought little and unconcerned about their adoption background;
- Limited identity, began to explore and at least discussed with friends about adoption;
- Unsettled identity, obsessed with adoption background and felt frustrated at not knowing enough;
- Integrated identity, balanced view of adoption background with favorable feelings towards birth parents and adoptive parents.

None of these types were considered "more healthy" than another, as it was expected for a future research project that these adolescents-turned-adults would mostly have an integrated identity. Harold D. Grotevant notated that when race and ethnicity are different between adoptee

and parents, then these identity developments become more complicated (Bebiroglu & Pinderhughes, 2012; Grotevant et al., 2007).

Although the National Survey of Adoptive Parents conclude that international adoptions have hit their peak and are slowly declining, placement numbers still support the proposition that more and more homes have multiracial children being raised with different traditions from their origins (Lee et al, 2006; National Center for Health Statistics, 2012). Consequentially, the study by the Minnesota International Adoption Project team stated that adoptees “may begin to experience feelings of loss of birth culture and family history and the growing awareness of racism and discrimination in their everyday lives” (2006, p. 571). These emotions have been found to lead to depression and low self-worth in preadolescent adoptees (Lee et al., 2006).

Of most interest are the statistics about transracial adoptions. Four out of 10 children are of a different race, culture, or ethnicity from that of the adoptive parents (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012; Vandivere et al., 2009). The primary ethnic background of all adoptive couples is overwhelmingly non-Hispanic white at 73%, while the number of non-Hispanic white adoptees are in the minority at 37%. If looking at international adoptions, then 92% of the adoptive couples are white while 63% of foster parents are white and 71% of private adoptions parents are white. Only 37% of adoptees in the United States are white with 23% black, 15% Asian, and 15% Hispanic. The adoption type—international, foster care, and domestic—significantly determines which races are the majority. For example, few foster care children are Asian, while it is the opposite for international placements (Vandivere et al., 2009). Besides racial comparisons, the Adoption USA Chartbook stated that, side-by-side with the general population of children, these adoptees “are more likely to be read to every day as young children (68 percent compared with 48 percent), to be sung to or told stories every day as young children

(73 percent compared with 59 percent), or to participate in extracurricular activities as school-age children (85 percent compared with 81 percent)” (2009, p. 5).

Vonk et al.’s (2010) group used data collected by the NSAP to determine perceptions of nine cultural socialization practices—including reading and telling ethnic stories daily—and hypothesized that parents would favor specific practices if stronger parent-child attachments were deemed to be the imminent result. Of the 2,089 adoptees, 802 were with transracial families, with 438 connected to domestic placements and 364 to international placements.

The researchers already knew that a previous study linked participation in cultural activities with preparation for adoption. The researchers were also sure that there was an indirect link between cultural socialization and overall satisfaction of the adoption experience (2010). International Transracial (ITR) and Domestic Transracial (DTR) families both had reading and telling about racial and ethnic books as the most popular forms of cultural socialization with 92% and 78% respectively. The ITR group had a higher percentage with the reading and telling if parents took advantage of postadoption online resources, while the DTR group read more if the parents evidenced one or more of these variables: they had biological children, the adoptee was black, and the adoptive parents participated in adoption support groups. Attending multicultural entertainment—including professional storytelling and theatre—ranked high involvement by ITR and DTR groups with 79% and 73% respectively (2010, p. 237). The extracurricular activities had more participants from the ITR group if the adoptee was a boy, while in the DTR group extracurricular activities were experienced more often when the adoptee was a girl. Closeness and satisfaction was statistically significant relative to multiracial entertainment with the ITR group. Parents were strongly motivated to be active in cultural socialization the more their children looked different from them. For example, Caucasian parents with Eastern European

children had the lowest percentages across the practices. Of all the ethnicities, Caucasian parents with Asian children were the most likely to engage in cultural socialization practices (2010).

Bebiroglu and Pinderhughes interviewed 10 white adoptive mothers and 10 Chinese 6 to 8-year-old adoptees about cultural socialization activities to strengthen identity with China and being Chinese. Through a grounded theory approach, they discovered that 8 of the 10 mothers said that cultural socialization was necessary for their children to have a positive outlook toward their identity. Four of the parents, coming from predominantly white neighborhoods, did not recognize ethnic-racial differences and chose, instead, to use the color-blind approach. One mother said that she avoided using the word “race” in her home. Another four mothers, who were motivated to use cultural socialization practices, focused on structured—professional and ongoing—as well as unstructured—informal and less regular—approaches. Reading books about China or Chinese stories was the only activity experienced by all parents despite feeling the need to boost cultural identity for their children (2012). Reading stories often produces similar results as oral storytelling. I now share studies that linked oral storytelling as important within families starting with “sensemaking” and the narrative art.

### **Storytelling and the Family**

Karl E. Weick introduced “sensemaking,” a term borrowed from organizational studies that applies to families, because families are a type of organization (Weick, 1995). Families create a rule-centered system much like any organization in order to promote the well-being of all its members. The meaning-making within these units is likely to center around family interpretations of intense emotional situations, transitions, identity, and relationship bonding (Fiese et al., 2001). However, almost all research studies on sensemaking delve into the behavioral dynamics of corporations, schools, and government. One textbook advocated for

more studies to combine sensemaking and family life (Ashkanasy, Wilderom, & Peterson, 2000). Regardless of the context in which sensemaking is used, Weick proposed that people attribute meaning to events based on their surrounding culture and ideologies (Weick, 1995). As events occur constantly, the meanings that people experience change, and each change inspires a type of internal negotiation as to what sensory input to notice or remember (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008; Goffman, 1986; Weick, 1995).

An individual could create shared meanings with another person such as a spouse based on the same event under similar circumstances (Ashkanasy et al, 2000). Schank claims that the ability to remember moments depends on: immediacy of telling experience to self or others, frequency of telling, uniqueness, and the significance to oneself. “Which events we choose to make part of our stories is important to how we define ourselves: When new stories are constructed for telling, the process of constructing those stories changes memory significantly” (1990, p.137). According to Fiese et al. (2001) if the family storyteller failed to inspire others to add their perspectives to the story, there could be a struggle for the teller to relate the story to others resulting in being interrupted or ignored by the listeners.

Davis (2008) watched her mother suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and wondered if end-of-life stories serve as a sensemaking function. Through developing an auto-ethnographic case study of personal experiences, Davis predicted that such a project would revise familial boundaries, reframe lives, create shared meanings and identity, enhance relationships, and develop continuity between the past and the present.

Davis concluded that people constantly change their stories dependent on their experiences and their phase of life. Though “truth” may not be the most important element of the story, the perspectives and retrospectives allow the life story to evolve (Davis, 2008). She

realized that final stories do revise familial boundaries, frame lives, create shared meanings and identity, enhance relationships, and develop continuity between the past and the present. Davis stated, “Understanding our family stories helps us understand ourselves” (2008, p.18).

John Bowlby introduced attachment theory and, according to Frude and Killick, suggests that young children are biologically preprogrammed to seek security, and that they do this by striving to maintain proximity to an “attachment figure” (usually a parent) (2011, p. 448). Frude and Killick applied Bowlby’s findings to family storytelling and the attachment forged between the parent-storyteller and the child-listener. They stated, “Typically, children gain much of their understanding of the concepts and issues relevant to personal security from stories, because themes of security, threat, and abandonment are extremely common in folk tales and other stories” (2011, p.448). As attachment theory values quality of the activity over the amount of time spent, and Frude and Killick declared, “...any activity that can help to establish and maintain a secure attachment is likely to make an extremely valuable contribution to a child’s development. We maintain that storytelling by a caregiver is just such an activity” (2011, p. 449). They noted that professional storytellers have the same characteristics that a parent should strive for as an ideal attachment figure because storytellers are animated, engage the listeners, are aware of the mood and attitudes of the audience, and adapt the performance as needed (2011). Finally, Frude and Killick referenced a study by Lacher, Nicholls, and May in 2005 regarding foster and adoptive parents telling stories to heal the history of abuse in the child’s life. They posit that storytelling can be a tool for a new caregiver such as a foster parent or adoptive parent, to build attachment (2011).



Each member of a couple contributes different background narratives of family origins that merge together for purposes of parenthood. Parenting and adoption are considered events despite being drawn out over time.

Reporting on a study about narratives of adoptive parents, Fiese and Sameroff (1999) wrote:

“The meanings that couples make embody interpretations of these events and interactions and reflect their understandings about the past, their expectations about the future, and their understanding about relationships in which they do or might participate. (p.69)

Keefer and Schooler observed that when an adopted child approaches an age of understanding, parents often are as nervous about discussing the adoption details as they are about having a sex, puberty, or drug talk. The relationship between the adoptive couple and the child will be redefined and will contribute to the beginning stages of telling the child’s life story. Some parents fear the background of the birthparents and feel it is better to keep it a secret. A child can sense any missing pieces of the story and may go through life with a confused sense of identity (2000).

Children who lived with birth family members before placement could have memories. It is then the adoptive parents who could be “storehouses for those memories.” The adoptive parents could either help or hinder those fading memories of the child (Keefer & Schooler, 2000, p.115). Infants who arrive in the adoptive couple’s home will, upon recommendation, become familiar with terms such as “adoption” and “adopted”. The “telling” of the adoption is a key part of developing the relationship between the adoptive couple and the child (Morris, 1999).

Beyond “telling” is the need to train parents to tell better for their adoptees. These next studies highlight good practices in the classroom that these scholars claimed also worked in the

home. In 2009, Akpınar and Öztürk claimed that anyone in a teaching position—including parents—can provide cultural education through folktales. Their main focus was on 25 third grade students. These students were videotaped in class as well as during student performances of their cultural research projects after being introduced to three illustrated folktales of same length and reading level from Estonia, Greece, and Slovenia. The researchers tested the students in order to discover whether they “learned the most specific cultural elements of the countries related to the themes of the folktales,” and whether they comprehended the stories’ plots and motives (p.74). Akpınar and Öztürk stated, “All the students were able to make a connection between the information they found about the country/culture (geographic location, economy, climate, foods, agricultural products, natural resources, clothing, etc.) and the folktale they read” (pp.74-75). They went on to observe that the students not only learned but were engaged and active in all class discussions as a result of the folktales. Most of the students even used words gained from the folktales to share their reports in front of the class. Akpınar and Öztürk quoted Gerhard H. Weiss who indicated that “folklore and folktales in their varied forms make useful tools for the presentation of a foreign culture—a presentation which can be not only informative, but entertaining as well” (p.76).

Previously, Akpınar and Öztürk collected studies showing that folktales had six main characteristics that made them valuable and appropriate for children and helped them to condense the stories to retell in their own words:

- Contained simple plots children can easily follow;
- Made sense of the world, because there is little ambiguity in folktales, and because children can identify with the characters;
- Appealed to sense of justice with sense of adventure;

- Informed and comforted;
- Fostered imagination;
- Introduced other countries and people by using a folktale's structure and the culture's unique beliefs, values, life-styles, and history. Children share similar emotions and needs like they do; the difference between cultures is evident in how these needs are satisfied (pp.70-71).

Parents can use these six main characteristics to be more effective with cultural identity with their adoptees.

Virtue (2007), while studying four Danish folktales and the appropriateness of using them for education, recommended use of folktales for social studies lessons with a caveat: culture taught through the folktales could be outdated, negative, or contain misleading stereotypes and details. Sometimes children cannot distinguish between the values and traditions of the past and present-day values. Instead of building racial identity, the child becomes confused, and, in rare cases, frustrated. Virtue (2007) stated, "...although a folktale may mirror certain characteristics of the cultural group within which it originated, it must be determined whether those characteristics are specific to a past social context or if they are enduring traits that exist today" (p.25). He encouraged people to do the following before sharing the folktale condensed in these words:

- Be careful of "presentism" that misinterprets the story based on the values upheld today rather than the values upheld in the past.
- Read the folktale carefully...what negative stereotypes might be reinforced by the tale? What information can be provided to address these stereotypes?
- Does the folktale illustrate enduring cultural themes? (pp. 26-27).

As parents adapt Virtue's (2007) findings appropriately for their own homes, the level of attachment increases.

Like all of the studies shared in this review of the literature, identity formation and the use of storytelling within the home overlap and are almost inseparable. The summary of these studies allows a greater appreciation for the summaries of the selected 12 adoption folktales shared in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### SELECTED STORY SUMMARIES

This chapter contains summaries of 12 adoption folktales that I used in my workshops with parents of adopted children. The summaries will allow the reader to recognize when the titles, characters, or plotlines emerge in the interview dialogues or in my analysis. In the Hero's Journey (Campbell, 1968) the call to adventure depends on the individual. For the birth parent it is the call to protect and plan for the child. For the adoptee it is the call to discover an identity that blends the knowledge of birth parents and adoptive parents. For the adoptive parent it is the call to be able to nurture and care for another. These 12 adoption folktales illustrate each of these three calls to adventure.

#### **Story #1—"Chen Xiang Chopped the Mountain" from China (Giskin, 1997)**

Upon Huashan Mountain, a young man entered a temple to pray for help with an exam to be held in Beijing. He wished to gain the status of scribe. A fairy flew above this same temple—dedicated to her—and heard the prayer. She saw the young man and fell in love with him. The young man shared the affection. Although against the laws of heaven for an immortal to love a mortal, the fairy and the young man eloped. The fairy gave birth to a little boy. The fairy's brother discovered the forbidden act, cracked the Huashan Mountain, and threw the fairy into it. The young man died—from either a broken heart or by the hand of the fairy's brother. The baby was left, crying on the ground.

At this point, one of three things could have possibly happened. Either the Monkey King, Sun Wukong, who came bounding by, raised the child and caused chaos along the way. Or the Thunder God, Lei Gong, while floating upon a cloud and searching for where to start a storm, lifted the child and taught the ways of punishment and justice. And finally, the Old One, Tai

Shang Lao Jun, riding upon his donkey, stopped and cared for the child and imbued the child with the attribute of being a peacemaker. For this version, we follow the Old One.

After the boy learned all that he needed and became a young man, the Old One felt it was time to give the young man a golden ax. The Old One explained that only the young man had the power to rescue his mother entrapped in Huashan Mountain. The fairy's brother learned of the young man's quest and stood between the young man and the mountain. The young man, thinking about what the Old One taught of peace rather than revenge, fought the fairy's brother in defense and nothing more. The fairy's brother noticed the young man's calm and departed. The young man raised the ax, brought it down on Huashan Mountain, and rent the rocks in twain. The mother and child reunited while the Old One smiled from above.

### **Story #2—"The Boy of the Red Sky" from Canada (Peck, 1998)**

Living upon an island, a man and wife daily wished aloud for a child. One day, the kingfisher told the wife, "Look in the seashells." The next day, the seagull told the wife, "Look in the seashells." With the urgings from these two birds, the woman peered in the seashells. She discovered a little boy. After a time, the boy grew to such size that he needed to learn how to hunt. The boy asked for his adoptive mother's copper bracelet to be hammered into tiny bow with arrows. The bow and arrow possessed power and accuracy, as he always brought home food when he took them with him on the hunt. Suddenly the parents noticed a shine—a copper glow—upon the boy's face. When asked about this glow, the boy remained silent.

One day the winds thrashed against the waves and prevented the father from drifting in his boat to fish and feed the family. The boy said, "I will come with you for I am stronger than the Spirit of the Storm." The boy took the oars, and while he was rowing, calmness returned to the waters. Then the Spirit of the Storm summoned Black Cloud and the Mist of the Sea. The

father feared they would become lost at sea, but the boy comforted him, encouraged the father to stay with him, and assured him that all would be well. The boy and his father arrived at the fishing grounds. The boy sang a magic song that lured the fish into the nets. The father asked the source of this power. The boy replied, “It is not time yet.”

The next day the boy hunted many birds, took their feathers, and created a gray bird skin to enable him to fly over the waters. Then he created a blue jay bird skin and flew over the waters. Finally, he created a robin bird skin and hovered above the waters.

The water reflected the colors of each bird skin. The boy flew back to the man and wife and announced, “I am the Child of the Sun. I must go now.”

Before departing, he gave his adoptive mother a robe that, when she loosened it, a storm brewed. When she tossed a feather, then the boy would return. When there was a red night sky, there would be no wind the next day. The boy gave power to his adoptive mother over the elements from that day to this day. Yet, the adoptive mother saw the greatest power in the chance to see her son from time to time.

### **Story #3—“The Charcoal Woman’s Son” from Cuba (Bierhorst, 2002)**

A noblewoman became intrigued by the charcoal woman who always delivered coal throughout the streets. One day, the noblewoman met the charcoal woman instead of her servant. The charcoal woman noticed that the noblewoman, like herself, was pregnant. The charcoal woman declared, “I predict that one day our two children will marry!” Upset, the noblewoman ordered a servant to kill the charcoal woman’s baby boy when he was born. The noblewoman demanded the baby’s tongue and finger as proof that the deed had been accomplished.

The servant spared the life of the baby, and cut the tongue from a puppy instead. With no other substitute for the finger, the servant cut off the baby’s finger and sent the boy down the

river in a basket. When the noblewoman received the tongue and finger from the servant, she hung a sign outside her home, “What God made, I destroyed.”

The boy floated to a sandy shore, the same favorite walking spot for a king. He brought the child home to his queen, and having no children, they raised the boy as their heir. They created a gold finger for the boy. When the boy turned 20, the king and queen revealed that the truth. The boy, now a young man, wished to find his birth parents. After traveling through many towns, he spied the nobleman’s sign. He also saw the noblewoman’s daughter.

The noblewoman invited the royal young man for a feast. During the feast, the young man inquired of the servants and the daughter on the meaning of the sign. The same servant who had hung that sign offered to take the young man to his mother. The young man proposed to the noblewoman’s daughter and invited his birth mother to wear a veil at the wedding. All guests learned the truth of the noblewoman’s deeds. The noblewoman, in shock, choked and died.

#### **Story #4—“Littlebit” from Chile (Bierhorst, 2002)**

A poor old couple talked aloud one night of wanting a child, even if the child was a little bit of a thing. A voice above boomed, “You shall have the child you wish!” The couple glanced at each other and decided they must be going crazy. While scrubbing clothes the next day, the old woman felt some wriggling in her sleeve. Thinking it was a lizard, she shook her sleeve until something plopped into the water. A tiny boy called, “Mama, save me from drowning!” The woman reached for the boy and named him Littlebit. The couple, afraid someone would take the boy away from them, kept Littlebit a secret for 7 years.

Then the family faced harsh times when the couple became feeble and unable to earn much money. One day they only had 30 cents left. The woman asked Littlebit to take 10 cents to the butcher for meat. The butcher doubted that Littlebit could carry 10 cents worth of meat.



Littlebit declared not only could he carry 10 cents of meat, but that he could carry a whole steer. The butcher took the challenge, and Littlebit hefted the steer away. The meat fed the family for some time, but eventually the food ran out. The woman sent Littlebit to the bakery with five cents. The baker dared Littlebit to carry the largest basket of bread for the five cents. Littlebit accepted and the basket disappeared down the road. The woman asked Littlebit to bring back 10-cents worth of sugar and herbs. He returned with a case of sugar and a barrel of herbs on one shoulder. With the last five cents, the woman requested that Littlebit buy some onions. On the way to the farmer's place, Littlebit found and kept a penknife. He hailed the farmer, who stood next to a grazing cow. The farmer failed to hear Littlebit. The cow swallowed Littlebit and he escaped by using the penknife to free himself from the cow. The farmer complained that now he had to be rid of the dead cow. Littlebit offered to take the steer and the onions. The farmer laughed and made the deal for five cents. By that time, the king heard of Littlebit's strength and invited Littlebit to sit next to the throne for always. Littlebit refused until the king promised that the old couple could come as well.

#### **Story #5—"N'oun Doaré" from Celts (Ellis, 2002)**

A chieftain named Bras traveled home after buying a plough-horse when he heard a cry from a bush. He found a 5-year-old boy shaking from the cold and whimpering in his sleep. The chieftain questioned the boy regarding his father, mother, where he came from, and his name. Each time the boy answered, "I don't know". Bras declared that the boy would be known as "I don't know" or "N'oun Doaré" until he earned a different name. As the chieftain and his wife, Anvab, had no children, they adopted the boy after first asking throughout the surrounding five kingdoms if anyone was missing a child.

When the boy turned 17, Bras swore before his people that N'oun Doaré as his heir. Bras took the boy to the best blacksmith to have a sword fashioned for him. The young man passed by all the well-crafted swords, and chose a rusty iron sword from among a pile of scrap metal. Bras offered to provide the young man with a horse. Once again, N'oun Doaré walked past the purebred horses and chose a ragged and skinny mare. He discovered that the sword cut through anything and that the horse teleports. When riding the horse, he came upon the same place he was found as a child. At the foot of a stone lay a crown. N'oun Doaré picked up the crown and heard a voice say he must go to Vannes. The crown belonged to a princess and the young man accepted a quest to rescue this princess so that so a king could marry her. While on the journey, the horse told N'oun Doaré to save a fish, a kestrel, and a snake-man-with-horns. N'oun Doaré obeyed. The young man tricked the princess on the back of the horse and transported the princess to the king. However, the princess demanded that she wear a certain ring before the wedding. N'oun Doaré remembered that the princess had tossed the ring of the castle into the sea during the teleportation. The kestrel summoned all the birds and one bird small enough fit in the keyhole and brought the ring. The princess then requested to have her castle. The snake-man transported the castle. The princess asked for the key to the castle. The fish swam and recovered the key. At this point, N'oun Doaré's mare rushed into the castle, ate the hay inside, and transformed into a girl. The mare-turned-girl offered to tell N'oun Doaré everything about his past including his birth parents. The young man passed on this chance and instead remained with Bras and Anvab.

#### **Story #6—"The Traveler's Secret" from Italy (Marshall, 1928)**

While harvesting grapes, a father saw his 2-year-old daughter snatched by a kidnapper. The parents grieved and searched for 5 years. One day a 7-year-old boy stepped into the road and

asked for food. The man invited the boy to eat supper. The boy explained that his father abandoned him and his mother when he was 2 years old. Only 2 days ago his mother died.

The man and woman raised the boy, Oresto, as their own. When the boy turned 18, he built a house for his parents. One day, a traveler stayed in the couple's house and the meal conversation turned to the kidnapping of their daughter 16 years ago and finding the boy 11 years ago. The traveler fainted and whispered "Cecilia".

After the traveler rested and left, Oresto filled a cart and drove it to market. A little way down the road, the traveler stood and blocked Oresto's way. The traveler revealed to Oresto that he was his birth father and kidnapped the girl all those years ago. The traveler sold his soul and his first baby to a wizard so that he could live for 200 years. When his son was born, the traveler delayed 2 years before bringing the child to the wizard who lived in a crystal castle beneath the sea. The wizard appeared to the traveler and threatened that his family would die unless the agreement was met. Rather than taking Oresto, the traveler kidnapped a girl and pretended she was his child. The wizard, thinking that the traveler's wife threw him out of the house for taking their child, offered for the traveler to raise the girl until age 18. Then the wizard would return and take the child. The wizard allowed the traveler to go anywhere he wanted for 3 days of the year. The traveler learned of his wife's death, tried to find his son, and looked for Cecilia's parents.

The traveler asked Oresto to arrive at noon the next day by the sea to a secret crystal chamber that led under the waters. The traveler could open the door to the wizard's palace and aid in Cecilia's escape. Oresto arrived as promised and fell in love at the sight of Cecilia. The traveler insisted on staying behind so they would not see him die. Cecilia and Oresto refused, though as soon as the traveler crossed onto shore, he became ill due to breaking the wizard's

agreement. Oresto took everyone home and the traveler passed peacefully, knowing he was forgiven by all and promised the blessing of Cecilia and Oresto.

### **Story #7—"The Wanderings of Isis" from Egypt (Zappler, 1971)**

Seth secretly killed Osiris and forced his wife, Isis, to work for him in the spinning house. Thoth, the spokesman for the gods, told Isis to escape. Thoth reminded her that she was still the mother goddess and daughter of earth and sky. She slipped out with baby Horus and asked seven scorpions to follow them to a land where Seth could not enter. While journeying, Isis asked a noble lady for shelter. Seeing the giant scorpions, the noble lady refused. Isis walked further on, to the other side of the city and knocked on the door of a fisher girl who opened the door and gave all she could in food and hospitality. Meanwhile, the scorpions gave all the poison of their stingers to the largest and strongest scorpion. This scorpion broke into the noble lady's home, stung her son, and caused the house to burn. Isis smelled the smoke, awoke, and heard the cries of help from the noble lady. Bearing no malice towards the lady, Isis healed the son. The lady gave her riches left over from the blaze to the fisher girl in gratitude. Isis traveled farther, reached the marshes, and parted from the scorpions. She still had to beg for food and she placed the baby on the ground, hidden by reeds, so as to reach homes with generous people faster. She returned to find Horus poisoned. Despite her skill for healing, she did not know the name of this poison. Without the name, she could not cast it away as she had done with the noble lady's son. Isis called out to the heavens. At this time, Ra traveled the sky on his boat and asked Thoth to investigate the plea. Thoth flew to Isis and used the most powerful of magic to cast the poison out from the baby. Isis realized that this would be one of many difficulties that she would face. She would still have trouble and would wish to protect Horus from the rage of Seth. Thoth chose the people from Chemmis to adopt and raise Horus.

**Story #8—"The Widow Who Gathered Sticks" from Maasai (Wilhelm, 1996)**

A wealthy woman wished to belong. She had riches enough to have anything in life...except children. The woman sought a healer and learned about a certain sycamore tree. She plucked 12 fruit and placed them in earthenware. The 12 fruits transformed into boys and girls in the morning, satisfying the woman's desire to have more children than her sister-in-law who was the Chieftain's wife. The woman displayed her kids at every opportunity. One day the youngest child refused to be paraded about. The wealthy woman slapped her. During that night all 12 children returned to the tree. The wealthy woman stomped to that tree and commanded the children to come down. The fruit only glared with such intensity that the woman ran home.

Meanwhile, a poor widow woman gathered sticks and wondered aloud what would happen when she was no longer able to gather. God heard and sent a messenger to ask, "Would you like a husband or would you like children?" Though she knew a husband could care for her, she wished to care for children. The messenger took the widow to the sycamore tree. The wind blew and 12 fruits fell to the ground and automatically transformed into the children. They ran to the widow and embraced her. The next day the children and the widow worked together in harmony.

**Story #9—"Ivan the Cow's Son" from Russia (Afanas'ev, 1975)**

A king and queen struggled to have children for 10 years. The king asked throughout the kingdom regarding who would know the solution to his wife's apparent inability to have a child. A peasant's son told the king to catch a gold-finned pike with three silk nets and to serve them to the queen to eat. The queen, scullery maid, and a cow ate the fish and became pregnant with all three giving birth at the same time. The three boys looked alike and all were named Ivan. One was the prince and the king adopted the other two. They wished to see the world and competed

with each other to determine which of them would be considered the eldest. Ivan the Cow's son proved strongest and smartest in throwing a ball the highest and subduing a serpent. Upset at his brothers' jealousy, Ivan the Cow's Son returned home. The king imprisoned him for abandoning his brothers. The king released him when he promised to find and protect his brothers who headed into dragon country.

When Ivan overtook his brothers, he urged that someone stand guard while they slept for 2 nights. The first and second nights, Ivan the Cow's son protected Ivan the Scullery Maid's son and Ivan the Prince from a six-headed dragon and a nine-headed dragon respectively. For the third night, Ivan the Cow's son pleaded that this time the other two brothers would stay awake instead of resting in the lands of the 12-headed dragon. The brothers dozed off, found their brother Ivan missing, and assumed him dead. They headed home. Ivan the Cow's son healed, caught up with his brothers on the path, and chastised them. Ivan the Cow's son suspected that the hut by the last fight held secrets. He told his brothers to travel ahead. Ivan the Cow's son transformed into a fly and flew inside the hut. Baba Yaga returned home and the fly-Ivan learned that the three dragons were Baba Yaga's sons. To Baba Yaga the daughter-in-laws revealed their plans to kill the three brothers: one would turn into a well, another into a garden, and the last into a hut—all as temptations to the brothers. Then Baba Yaga said she would turn into a pig and swallow the brothers if all those plans fail. Ivan the Cow's son thwarted the plans, had Baba Yaga attacked by some nearby villagers, and vowed to watch over his brothers from then on.

**Story #10—"Koobar the Drought-Maker" from Australian Aboriginals (Mountford, 1980)**

Koobar lost his parents and he was ill-treated and neglected by his relatives. The relatives fed Koobar the smallest of scraps from the leaves of gum trees. The sun beat down on the land and Koobar thirsted. Especially during this time the relatives hid the water buckets. One day the

relatives forgot to hide the water buckets. After the relatives left to gather food Koobar rushed to the buckets and quenched his thirst. Fearing that the water would be taken from him, Koobar took the buckets, grasped a sapling, and chanted a song to urge the tree to grow. The relatives returned thirsty and tired. They found the buckets in the tree and demanded the water. Koobar refused. They attempted to retrieve the water. They failed. Two medicine men succeeded and beat Koobar. The beaten body of Koobar changed into a koala. The people stood aghast as the koala-boy Koobar climbed the tree and ate the leaves, no longer needing water. From then on, the law of the land was if a koala was killed, the bones cannot be broken until after the meat is cooked. Otherwise, a drought comes and only koalas survive.

**Story #11—"The Magic Fish Hook" from New Zealand (Amery, 2001)**

Ira-Whaki and Taranga had five sons all named Maui, but the youngest son was born sickly. The custom was to toss any sick baby into the sea. Taranga wished for this Maui to escape such a fate. She scratched the name "Maui" onto a bone and tied it around the baby's neck. Then she let the baby drift on a bed of seaweed. Tangaroa, the god of the sea, found the child and raised Maui as his own. When Maui reached manhood, Tangaroa explained his origins. Maui sought his family and spied his mother and brothers for the first time in many years at a dance. The mother welcomed him, although the four brothers fumed with jealousy. The brothers wished to prove that Maui was lazy. They awoke early to go fish so as to report later that Maui brought no fish. Maui suspected this plan and awoke earlier. He hid in the brothers' canoe. While out to sea, Maui revealed himself to his brothers. The brothers failed to catch any fish, but Maui took a magic fish hook—the same bone with "Maui" scratched on it—and cast it to sea. The hook latched onto land underneath the waters. Maui pulled, heaved, and hefted the land to the

surface. He asked his brothers to pull as well. The brothers cast aside ill feelings, aided Maui, and eventually the North Island of New Zealand was formed.

**Story #12—“The Gardener’s Wife” from Colombia (Bierhorst, 2002, entitled “The Three Sisters”)**

A guard overheard three sisters. One wanted to marry a baker, one wanted to marry a steward, and one wanted to marry the king. All three wishes came to pass. Two sisters were jealous. For the queen’s first child, the sisters acted as midwives and replaced the child with a dog. The queen’s son was sent down the river. A gardener and his wife discovered and raised him. For the queen’s second child, the sisters replaced the child with a cat. This son was sent down the river. A gardener and his wife discovered and raised him. For the queen’s third child, the sisters replaced the child with a stick. The daughter was sent down river. Once again, the gardener and his wife took in the child. Time passed and the queen, depressed from losing three children, roamed the kingdom. She saw a garden. She told the gardeners that three things were missing from the garden: a speaking bird, a dancing tree, and living water. The boy, the queen’s lost son, left on this quest. He was warned not to listen to a voice that says “Throwaway child! Shame!” Not heeding the warning, he reacted and he turned into a crystal ball. The second boy, another of the queen’s lost sons, left on the quest and faced the same fate. The girl, the queen’s lost daughter, prepared to leave on the quest, ignored the voice, and restored her brothers. All three siblings returned the three items to the garden. The king, queen, and the queen’s two sisters traveled to the garden to see. The speaking bird revealed the crimes of the sisters. The king sentenced the sisters to death. The queen invited the gardener and his wife to live in the castle with the children.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

My purpose for this study is to evaluate the sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment demonstrated through story talk, the conversations and experiences that arose with the participating adoptive families from listening to stories. In order to do so, there are two main areas that required description: (1) the synopsis of the two pilot programs and the two evaluated workshops, and (2) the interview responses from the nine adoptive parents.

Each pilot program and evaluated workshop had its own personality and nuance. The storytelling and game workshop originally focused on adoptive families who had more than one culture in the home. Five of the seven adoptive families had biracial or international connections. When other adoptive families asked to come, I opened the door, anticipating more perspectives to further this work.

Due to being an action research project, the responses to the interview questions determined what worked and did not work during my workshops. With the participants' answers, I continued the action research cycle (McNiff, 2002) of trial and error, always searching for the optimal way to cultivate story talk. The basic information about the adoptive families (names changed) can be found in Appendix A. The background answers from questions 1 through 5, which can be viewed in Appendix B, have been added only as clarifying points. These first five questions focused on the following: (1) Personal adoptive family story of how the adoption(s) came to be; (2) Dunbar's four categories for adoptee identities and which of these categories the participants' thought best described their adopted child(ren); (3) How the adopted child(ren) feels about being adopted; (4) How the adopted child(ren) feels about their ethnicity; and (5) Share about a time each adopted child(ren) expressed a difference in ethnicity and how the

parent responded. I compiled the overall observations for question 6 “What did your adopted child like most about the (country/tribe) folktale? Why?” and question seven “What cultural game/activity did your adopted child like most? Why?” and added the answers from question 10 “Before the ‘Year of the Adopted Family’ workshop, what was your experience with storytelling? In 1 year, how do you see storytelling playing a role in your adoptive family, if at all? Five years? Ten years?” I included an at-a-glance table featuring the storytelling background and role predictions in Appendix E. The responses to question 8 “What were the strengths of the “Year of the Adopted Family” performance/workshop? Weaknesses?” merged, when applicable, with these observations. This section ended with question 9 “How adaptable, if at all, are using folktales—regardless of origin—to teach: a. Cultural identity? Why? b. Adoptee identity? Why?”

### **Pilot Program #1**

As 7:00 p.m. approached on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010, adoptive couples trickled in to receive their binders for the “Year of the Adopted Family” project. There was a buzz in the hallway, though these couples became focused and studious when entering the Weber State University Shepherd Union Building of Room 312. Holly Robison, my storytelling friend, manned the registration table to greet these couples. She volunteered to be there as support. I accepted gladly. About 30 chairs welcomed these couples, but the front row continued to be ignored. I stacked the first row of chairs and suddenly the second row became the first row. I slid forward the whiteboard, podium, and clock on the floor. Glancing out the window, we could see the white blizzard that showered upon the valley only 2 hours previous to the workshop’s start-time. Adoptive couples in attendance proved their commitment. The expected 10 couples suddenly transformed into six couples. One of the couples said they would need to leave by 8:30 p.m. in order to hurry back to their babysitter. I wondered what this might mean for my

thesis project because all of this pilot program's fliers mentioned that the performance workshop would end at 9:30 p.m.

Despite the empty chairs, the group was ready. The two video cameras rolled and recorded and the performance part began. The couples listened as I told the story "The Charcoal Woman's Son" from Cuba followed by "Littlebit" from Chile, and finally "The Wanderings of Isis" from Egypt. After hearing the three stories, about 20 minutes was allotted for the couples to look over the other nine story summaries and read them aloud. I heard comments such as "I like that one" or "That might work". Then we had a break.

During this break, one of the couples received a call from a hysterical child who was left to babysit the other siblings. The couple knew they had to go and apologized for having to leave. Later I discovered that of the four couples remaining, one of the couples did not experience adoption placement yet. They expected to have a child in January 2011, as the birth mom chose them. Thankfully, the quiet and "studious" group became more comfortable with each other—and with me—and laughed and made comments more freely. The happiest noises occurred during the story boarding process. The couples lovingly looked at each other's papers and offered compliments or ideas to each other. By the end of the performance workshop, I felt like we were friends and all committed to the grand finale of this venture with everyone telling stories to their adopted child between Christmas and New Year's Day. By 9:30 p.m. the weather had cleared. The couples returned home safely to their adopted children.

### **Pilot Program #2**

Rather than teaching only adoptive families, I asked for the opportunity to practice and to receive feedback on the workshop at the Utah Storytelling Guild Olympus Chapter meeting on November 14, 2012, at the downtown Salt Lake City Library. I condensed the workshop

handouts that used a one-inch binder into a two-sided handout for the eight storytellers. Although the meeting lasted from 7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m., the Chapter needed the first few minutes to make announcements and the last part of the meeting for people to receive coaching on stories. I used 1 hour instead of the 1 ½ hours for the adoptive family workshop and focused on a high-quality performance and presentation.

Throughout the workshop, I verbally recognized the listeners as storytellers rather than the intended adoptive couple audience. I attempted to describe the broader application of these stories without confusing my intended application for adoptive families. The stories and activities remained strong though my transitions suffered. I only told the short Chinese story “Chen Xiang Chopped the Mountain” and explained and demonstrated the Chinese story games. The most popular game was “Lists, Lists, and More Lists”. As for the “Last Word, First Word” game, storytellers remarked that the game developed good skills though even the storytellers struggled to keep a storyline and rather kept to a poetic form. One of the participants was blind and tested my ability to adapt the explanations without aid of gestures or body language.

Because I worried that the storytellers needed a general outlook versus a specific adoption application of the stories and games, my objectives became blurred. The storytellers mentioned that while the stories, story-boarding, and games were fun and well-explained, the overall purpose and objectives shifted too often. I knew I would be more in-the-moment for the purpose when with actual adoptive families. I chose not to worry about the storytellers story-boarding, telling, or playing the games with their families as would be done with adoptive families. One storyteller told me afterward that she easily remembered to use songs during performances and never during games. After this workshop, she appreciated games more and saw them as a great addition to the classroom setting.

## **Evaluated Workshop #1**

My husband and I took a road trip north to Boise, Idaho on November 29, 2012. We arrived to set-up, though the doors at the A New Beginning Adoption Agency were locked. Thankfully, we heard from someone who unlocked the doors with time to set up. I had nine adoptive families RSVP in the affirmative a few days before the event. Three of these nine families regretfully declined when they realized that no nursery would be provided. The lady who unlocked the doors mentioned that for other adoptive events, many families have said they would come and then did not show. When the time edged to 7:00 p.m., we started despite the low attendance of two people.

A 12-year-old daughter, tagging along to do homework, requested to join us. The mother granted permission. I had already decided to tell the Chinese story “Chen Xiang Chopped the Mountain”. With the daughter being of Chinese decent, the choice made even more sense. Although I kept eye contact with the two adults, I watched carefully for the daughter’s reaction to hearing a story from her heritage. I followed that Chinese piece with “The Gardener’s Wife” from Colombia and finally with “The Widow Who Gathered Sticks” from the Maasai tribe of East Africa. I originally planned to share the Russian story “Ivan the Cow’s Son” due to knowing one of the RSVPed families adopted from Russia. When that particular family missed the workshop, I switched to the Maasai story as one of the attendees had three children who had African American connections. Even for the sake of time, that change made it possible to fit all the activities in the promised 1 ½ hour time. When we story-boarded the Chinese story, the two ladies practiced with each other by telling it from the pictures. Normally, we would have had a few couples talk at once and allow the partners to feel comfortable practicing. I stepped from the room to give some privacy and then called out to switch when the first finished. We played the

games “Last Word, First Word” as well as “Lists, Lists, and More Lists.” For the games, the two ladies and the one daughter participated. We scheduled the telephone interviews before everyone left for home at 8:30 p.m. One of these parents, who also worked at an adoption agency, requested that the workshop be presented at a postadoption conference.

### **Evaluated Workshop #2**

I set up the room at a local church building in Layton, Utah on Friday, February 1, 2013, an hour before starting at 7:00 p.m. I placed one-inch binders with the handouts as well as the check-in instructions on a table in the back of the room. We started on time and reserved the first 10 minutes for people to read the consent forms and sign them. The attendees, representing six adoptive families, learned about the workshop through personal invitations from friends as well as the email fliers distributed to local adoption agencies. One family arrived, read the consent forms, and opted to not participate. They realized their children would be too young for my recommended audience age of 5 to 18. My husband and storytelling friend Holly Robison helped with the nursery across the hall from my room. Henry and Allison brought their 5-year-old, 4-year-old, and 3 ½-month-old sons and allowed all three boys to accompany them for the workshop. They wished to experience the stories and games as a family despite a nursery provided for the two youngest boys. Three kids played in the nursery.

I told three stories: “Littlebit,” “The Gardener’s Wife,” and “The Widow Who Gathered Sticks.” The three stories felt appropriate because a few families had Hispanic and African-American adopted children. Five children joined their parents: a 14-year-old boy, a 6-year-old girl, two 5-year-old boys, and one 4-year-old boy. I made eye contact with everyone while telling the stories with more attention given to the children. I debated on telling “The Gardener’s Wife” as it was a longer story and we had so many little ones. I told it anyway. We story-boarded the

Chinese story as a group. I asked for volunteers to draw the stick people and items on the huge pad of paper. Mostly the children responded.

We played games that connected to each of the three stories told: “Littlebit, Littlebit, what can you do?”, “Switched,” and “A Gathered Story—a.k.a. Story Sticks.” For the Story Sticks game, I gave each person a small plastic bag with 12 Popsicle sticks inside. The people wrote one word per side of the stick. We drew sticks that were spread in a large circle and created a story with the drawn word being part of the sentence. I wondered how the 4-year-old and 5-year-olds would respond. If the children were shy, their parents prompted them and the story continued around the circle. Being careful of the time, I ended at 8:30 p.m. I scheduled telephone interviews with most of the parents and emailed the others requesting interview times.

After attending this workshop, one of the adoptive parents emailed me another adoption folktale from Ethiopia, “The Tiger’s Whisker.” Then a parent who worked as a caseworker offered to analyze each of the selected stories as I edit the written and oral forms in the future. Such excitement from these parents confirmed the importance of these stories. Meanwhile, I developed more stories to share on stage. Likewise, I gained more workshop materials when I developed 25 story-based games and researched 12 traditional games that connected to the selected adoption folktales over the course of a year.

### **Participants’ Choices of Folktales and Games**

Out of 12 selected adoption folktales provided in full to these adoptive parents, each adult was to choose one story, story-board it, and then tell it to any adopted children in the family. Three families decided to share a story they had already heard in one of the two presentations given, while three families chose another story because it attracted their attention in one way or another. The seventh family chose one previously heard story and one that was new. A different

couple decided to tell the story together, with the husband taking the lead. For a summarized table of the responses, please see Appendix C. Further details are found under the name of each adoptive parent or family in this section.

From 2-year-olds to 26-year-olds—and even including the parents—the games were a loved part of this experience for the adoptive families. Three of the families played games that were shown during the performance workshop. Three more of the families played one game that had been demonstrated and one game that was new. Only one family decided to play two new games. See Appendix D to see significant findings at-a-glance. With a brief understanding of what occurred in the two pilot workshops and the two evaluated workshops, I now turn to an analysis of sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment. The first topic is sensemaking.

### **Sensemaking**

As mentioned in the Review of the Literature, sensemaking places meaning on events, such as experienced through storytelling moments, in order to promote the well-being of the family. Areas of sensemaking include meaning from ideologies, meaning from surrounding culture, meaning-making activities, and interpretations.

With those areas in mind, I made the following discoveries:

- Sensemaking for the parents increases when the stories and/or games are demonstrated before being shared in the home;
- Parents still choose to tell stories that include harsh details when they feel the freedom to adapt the stories as they see fit for their adopted children;
- Parents consider age and personality of their children when choosing how to present the stories.



## **Demonstrated Stories and Games**

First, I want to discuss the relationship between parents telling stories and playing games first demonstrated by me. Ashkanasy, Wilderom, and Peterson (2000) said sensemaking involves shared meanings when two or more people share a moment together. The study clarified “two or more people” to include a husband and wife or other family members experiencing something at the same time and then interpreting the meanings (Ashkanasy et al., 2000). I expanded the meaning to include the parents who shared a workshop session together with me. Additionally, I depended on the ability of the adoptive parents to use sensemaking to understand how to tell the adoption folktales and how to play the story games. About half of the parents told stories or played games that I first demonstrated [see stories choices in Appendix C and see game choices in Appendix D]. This places greater responsibility upon professional storytellers to choose their stories and games as carefully as possible in order to strive for a deeper connection with their audiences. Storytellers need to research the backgrounds of the audience and be in communication with the organizers about the venue. While that may seem like basic advice, I am surprised by how many storytellers jump on stage, glance over the audience, and count that as “knowing their audience.” Parents could learn from a professional storyteller and likewise “know their family.” Listen to what your children talk about. It does not have to relate to adoption topics. Could those everyday moments transition into parent-led discussions?

Kathleen had a parent-led discussion with her 12-year-old daughter from China about a disagreement of the ending of a story she and her daughter heard me tell. When hearing the Colombian story “The Gardener’s Wife,” Kathleen disliked the “biology is best” mentality where the importance of birth parents extends beyond the importance of adoptive parents. She

wanted her 12-year-old daughter from China to know that a “happily ever after” does not mean there is constant contact with the birth parents.

Kathleen explained the change:

In that story, the families returned to the biological family. In my version, the king and queen found them, shared them, and left [the children] to be raised by the

Gardener....There is a fear that ‘biological is best’. My daughter liked my ending better.

(Kathleen, personal communication, December 6, 2012)

Sensemaking involves finding meaning from ideologies, and Kathleen used that aspect of sensemaking to justify the change. Kathleen could have chosen a different adoption folktale. Instead, Kathleen wanted to retell the story that already had one meaning to be changed to another meaning.

As for the story games, the most popular one repeated from the workshops was the “A Gathered Story a.k.a. Story Sticks” game played by three different adoptive families. Whitney’s 5-year-old boy from Ethiopia received his plastic bag of 12 Popsicle sticks and left that workshop wanting to add more and more words.

Whitney said:

[My son] chose words for the sticks-like: frog, whale, cat, turtle, mouse, window, jump, dog, bird, cow, llama (that was my word), fish, light, school bus, snowman, dragon, duck, cooking, bag. He really likes this game. He asked if we could play again the day after. We played at least three times—he is always thinking of new words to add. (Whitney, personal communication, February 7, 2013)

I noted that during the workshop, Whitney’s son laughed louder than any of the other child and adult participants. That boy’s laughter solidified that memory. Schank (1990) stated that

intense laughter acts as one of many ways to solidify a memory in the brain. Schank (1990) also stated that the immediacy of telling the experience (and in this case playing a game) and the frequency of the action would solidify that experience in the brain. Whitney's son created meaning and maintained its significance by repeating the game and adding more story sticks. Finally, Schank (1990) shared "uniqueness" as a contributing factor of an activity repeating. Whitney mentioned that this was the first time they did oral storytelling and played these types of games. Her closest experience to oral storytelling was the story reading done by the local librarian. Through my workshop, Whitney and her son experienced a new shared event that causes sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

### **Stories with Harsh Details**

The next sensemaking-related proposition involved harsh details found within stories that did not deter adoptive parents from sharing them. Once again on the ideology side of sensemaking, Nancy, Allison, and David noticed that one or more stories had what some called "graphic," "morbid," or "disturbing" details. Yet, the specific stories mentioned as examples by these parents also were some of the most-told tales to the adopted children. Storyteller Elizabeth Ellis declared in one of my masters classes, "You need to make the comfortable uncomfortable and the uncomfortable comfortable." Of six important characteristics of folktales, Akpinar and Ozturk (2009) stated that folktales needed the ability to inform and to comfort. Their study focused only on third graders and lacked insight as to appropriateness for teenagers.

Something drew parents to these stories as these stories drew themselves to me. What sensemaking transpired for these parents to accept these stories—at least to the level of sharing them with their children aged as young as 5 years of age and as old as adults? We live in a world plastered with headlines on the news and on the Internet that would make most people cringe.

Add to these happenings the grief and loss felt by birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents. We, as human beings, recognize the vivid and harsh nature of our lives and find meaning in harsh and vivid folktales.

Based on each parent's morals, these parents had to decide whether to accept or reject these stories to be able to tell them to their children. For example, Nancy read all 12 adoption folktales and questioned the selection process. She remarked, "Some of the graphic stuff in the [stories] I didn't like."

From her background as an adoption social worker, Nancy referenced "The Charcoal Woman's Son", a story from Cuba, and later "The Gardener's Wife", a story from Colombia:

Okay, right off the bat, nobody liked that a puppy was getting its tongue cut out, even my adult son was upset about a puppy getting its tongue cut out. And so that kind-of made me think, I don't know if that would be one I would really tell any kind of younger children at all, because they might fall apart over a puppy getting his tongue taken out....I would probably research the stories first a little bit...just read through them and see how I might want to change something like that....And another...like the one where the lady kept having the children and they'd just take the child away...I felt like that might make the kids think that it was easy just to throw a kid away or something, and I deal with birth mothers and adoptive families every day and...I just wouldn't ever want to come across that way, that it's that simple, that they just take a child away and mother never wonders what really happened or that....So I probably wouldn't pick that story to tell to younger adoptive kids. Of course my [older] kids could see through that, that it was just a story. But I would probably watch how I worded things like that...I mean, you didn't word

them wrong or anything, but I would probably just avoid that one (Laugh). (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013)

David debated on telling “The Widow Who Gathered Sticks” from the Maasai tribe. His family being his “surrounding culture” (Weick, 1995) caused him to pause on deciding on the story. Despite the hesitation, he still chose to tell this story though regardless of what he considered “harsh.”

He commented:

I read through all of the stories and interestingly, many of the stories talk about abuse...and I had a hard time about telling this story because this story...this woman slapped the face of the girl...but I decided why not tell the story and see what they think, but they didn’t react to that [part] at all and neither did my wife, and so that...I took a chance telling that story....but I still took a chance to tell this story because I liked that story a lot. All the kids loved the story, too. (David, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Being that his triplet sons were all teenagers, David probably considered their age before deciding. He did not indicate this during the interview. However, this shows the overlap of the second and third sensemaking propositions.

### **Age and Personality of Adoptees**

The third and last sensemaking proposition discusses the relationship between the age and personality of the child compared to the story chosen by the adoptive parent. Sensemaking thrives on interpretations, and these interpretations included what the parents noticed about what impressed their children—or what did not impress them. Age and personality influence interpretations for the adoptive parent as well as for the adoptee.

David expected a certain reaction from his family when the wealthy woman slapped the adopted girl in Maasai story “The Widow Who Gathered Sticks.” David explained that he and his wife had adopted 16-month-old triplets, all now aged 14, and one of these boys attended the “Year of the Adopted Family” workshop with him. David said, “I asked [my son who attended] if he would help me tell the story and he was excited about that, since he had heard the story already.” His wife and the two other triplets listened. With his son’s help in expounding the story and making sure that his father did not miss any parts, David noticed that when it came to that slapping moment, his storyteller-son raised his hand to act out that slap. When David said “they didn’t react to that [part]”, what he meant was that this added gesture by his son embellished the telling of the tale rather than linked that moment with the physical abuse of his youngest brother by their birth mother. David assumed his family would automatically think of the abusive history between one of the triplets and the birth mother. This adopted son received a detached retina and fractured skull as a result of this abuse besides having cerebral palsy and shunts in his head. As of today, this brother has the mentality of a 3 or 4-year-old. David and his wife said they struggled from the beginning on how much of this physical abuse they should share with the triplets. In the past three to four years, they have given short answers that seemed to satisfy the triplets’ curiosity.

One of David’s sons helped in the telling of the story. David knew this son was old enough and had the right personality to approach in helping tell the story to the rest of the family. As a story to be told in part by a youth teller, the story “The Widow Who Gathered Sticks” has one of the simplest plots. Akpinar and Ozturk (2009) emphasized that the folktales’ plots be simple so that children remain engaged in the story. Six out of my 12 selected adoption folktales exhibited complicated or epic plotlines more conducive to share with junior high and high school-aged

youth than to share with elementary-aged children (*The Charcoal Woman's Son*; *N'oun Doaré*; *The Traveler's Secret*; *The Wanderings of Isis*; *Ivan the Cow's Son*; *The Magic Fish Hook*; *The Gardener's Wife*). Simple plots could be enjoyed by all ages; complex plots could be appreciated more by teenagers and adults. Parents need to be more aware of their children's level of development when choosing stories. Otherwise, it could be expected that adaptations might occur that would transform the complex into simple plotlines, such as telling one of the episodes per session.

Interpretations often took the form of discussions by family members as they reflected on stories, games, and adoption topics. The most intense discussions occurred for adoptive families with teenagers. During these discussions, Nancy's family talked about several works of literature that featured orphaned or adopted children such as "Anne of Green Gables", "Tom Sawyer", "Huck Finn", and many pieces written by Charles Dickens. Nancy explained, "We just as a family feel that all of the great literature, especially for children, is based on [the characters] overcoming obstacles on their own and a lot of it is based on children who have had a significant loss, whether it's through the parents dying or becoming orphans or being adopted. Nancy said her family "also felt that [the stories] could identify across other cultures...that there is probably a story similar to [them] in a lot of cultures...." (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013).

Despite granting the freedom to adapt, I remained quiet about whether the families needed to discuss the experience with their children. Julie focused on telling the story and avoided any discussion. She asked me during the interview if she was supposed to have a discussion. I responded that I was not expecting a discussion and that it was more about telling the story. I left discussions up to each individual family to decide. I preferred that discussions, if made at all, be

natural and more child-instigated. Four parents, Nancy, Henry, Allison, and Lori, held discussions although I did not ask who started the conversations.

No matter the recording of exact dialogue for these discussions, sensemaking occurred for all nine adoptive families. Parents tapped into their ideologies by simply choosing stories and games. By fulfilling the story-boarding assignment, all the families did meaning-making activities. Five adoptive parents, Nancy, Henry, Allison, Lori, and Whitney, could confirm that they held discussions. Although, when it came time for the interviews, some parents were not as attentive to the details as other parents. When asked for more details, some of the “who said whats” became lost. After these sensemaking examples, I share the discoveries relating to attachment.

### **Attachment**

For these storytelling experiences, attachment came in the form of one of these four categories: security felt by the parents and children to tell stories and play games; quality of time spent together versus quantity of time; contribution to child development; and the parent being an aware and adaptable ideal attachment figure.

With those areas in mind, I made the following propositions:

- Parents feel more secure telling the stories and playing the games when they have already experienced performance storytelling;
- Attachment between parent and child increases with the quality time spent through storytelling and games.

### **Security and Experience to Storytelling**

First, I want to discuss the relationship between family members comfort level in telling stories and games to attachment. Jason, Julie, Lori, and Whitney had limited to no experience



with oral storytelling. Julie only saw storytelling at the local library's story time although this type of art could be considered story-reading. She explained, "[I read] books myself, and [I tried] to use voices and inflections or what not, but that's it. I really didn't have any experience with real storytelling." Comparing to all the parents' interviews, Julie expressed the most nervousness about telling the stories and staying away from reading the stories. She said that learning how to story-board gave her the confidence to tell as well as the encouragement from her 6-year-old daughter (Julie, personal communication, February 7, 2013).

Nancy, Henry, and Allison had more extensive experience, ranging from regularly attending storytelling festivals in the area to having children competing in the art. Drawing upon her drama background, Nancy coached all six of her children during their elementary years for the Weber State University Storytelling Festival based in Ogden, Utah. Nancy said, "They've all been participants in [the festival] and a couple of them have actually won some of the categories in there, so I've helped them with stories, helped them rehearse them." She guessed that her brother traveled as a professional storyteller though it sounded as if she needed to confirm that fact with him. Her brother had told stories for her family before. Nancy added, "I was always told stories by my parents and back in the day, you told kids stories." Her father told rather than read stories. She and her brother carried on that tradition. She stated, "I've always enjoyed it, you know, relating a story without having to sit and read it." People at her church learned about her skills and often called upon her to share for the children there (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013).

While her children now are too young, Allison encouraged her third grade students to audition and participate with the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival based in Orem, Utah for 4 years. She even volunteered at the Story@Home Conference held in Salt Lake City, Utah since

that event's inception in 2012. Meanwhile, her husband Henry became influenced by his father who told stories. As a result, "at least once a week, we're telling each other stories and oftentimes, I'll just give them direction to tell me who's in the story, what [they] are trying to do and where [they are], and we'll make up something." In his family the children hear the phrases "real story" and "fake story." The "real story" involves events that really did happen, usually on a personal or family level. The "fake story" adds random places, people, and things to combine into a silly story. Henry mentioned that one time the boy wanted the story to be about being in outer space, playing golf, and drinking Slurpees. A "fake story" could also include basing a story on a movie plot or sports hero. With this story game playing experience, the adoption-focused folktales and games only added to the types of stories already shared in his home (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

David was an exception to storytelling experience being a confidence-booster. For the past 10 years, he has attended storytelling festivals, eventually becoming a performer. Yet, before the storytelling workshop, David realized that he had not told stories in the home.

He said:

"I never really thought about telling stories to my own family. It's always been about telling stories to someone else....I [spent] hours learning stories to tell strangers and now, I need to start telling those same stories to the people that are most important in my life.  
(David, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Considering all the adoptive parents except for David, they confirmed Schank's (1990) study on narrative intelligence. Frequency of telling increases the ability to recall and tell stories with confidence. Attachment, including the quality of time spent together, plays an important role in helping the adoptee make a connection with a new family. Although the adoptees had

been part of these adoptive families for 1 or more years already, I saw this as a confirmation of Frude and Killick's (2011) work. Frude and Killick (2011) saw faster attachment with parent-storyteller and child-listener relationships. Some of the parents had more experience than others in being that "storyteller." The parents who exuded the most confidence in this project were the same ones who roamed storytelling festival grounds or shared daily or weekly story times in the home already.

### **Quality of Time**

The second attachment proposition delved into the quality of time spent together versus quantity of time. For my study, six of the seven adoptive families reported that the quality of time spent together lengthened the time originally expected for the storytelling and game playing. Frude and Killick (2011) stated that the longer those family members do an activity together, then the more secure and attached each family member feels towards each other. David even saw a normally-quiet son open up and talk more. Being a kinship adoption, David stated that he wanted an attachment with his adopted sons that matched the attachment with his two older biological sons. The triplet boys had been placed with him as babies though they knew and often visited their birth mother, David's sister.

During the interview, David realized that by being a parent and being willing to play the game, this could have influenced his son to "open up." David did not know how his family would respond to the stories and games. He was pleasantly surprised when his one son, who normally felt too old to play imagination games like this, was the one who constantly yelled "Switch!" for the game based on the Colombian story. David knew that the boys loved to play board games with his 26-year-old and 31-year-old biological sons.

The enthusiasm for the games continued for the Story Sticks game. David said he couldn't remember what the created story was about but remembered the energy in the room. With the "I'm-too-old-to-play-these-games" son, David "expected [him] just to grunt... but he didn't. He was really imaginative and he loved coming up with his own little twist to the story, and I was really surprised. And [my other son], the same thing. They were both really imaginative." David noted that his sons "gave [themselves] permission to have fun like you talked about, and [the one boy] always seem[ed] to be the controlled person, but he did give himself permission to have fun, and he actually saw how much fun he was having and it was good to see that." David made sure to always start each game and this son sat on his left and the story always continued to the left. He did not have to coax or prompt his son for ideas or to participate.

With this attachment building with this one son, David expanded his view of storytelling from being only on the stage. He stated that he intended to develop more short stories so that this son and the rest of his family could come to him in times of troubles.

Frude and Killick (2011) also noted that a parent needed to become an ideal attachment figure and adapt the storytelling performance as needed. I encouraged the adoptive parents to add story games to be played before, during, or after storytelling. As David and Whitney specifically stated in their interviews, games encouraged the parents to give themselves permission to play and be silly. Six of the seven adoptive families reported that the quality of time spent together lengthened the amount of time they originally thought would be dedicated to the storytelling and game playing. When Nancy's family played "A Gathered Story a.k.a. Story Sticks", she related, "We kept [the game] going (Laugh) and it kept getting bigger and bigger...." They started with each family member drawing one of the story sticks and using only one of the two options of nouns or verbs to create the story. The next family member added to the story. Nancy recalled at

least four rounds, though she added, “It just went on forever. We just kept going around and around with it....We just finally had to quit because my [17-year-old son] had homework and that’s what finally got him to stop, but he wanted to do [the game] instead of homework.

As for the story itself, Nancy remembered:

Yeah, [the story] was involved....it just had simple things like pumpkin, sand, water, fire, storm, things like that....They had a lion that was involved with a fire that was the result of a storm. Then my one son got the pumpkin stick and started with the headless horseman who lost his head and then a dog went out into the water and rescued the pumpkin and brought it back. (Laugh) ....And then birds came and pecked all of the pumpkin seeds out of the pumpkin head. (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013)

Nancy shared that she now keeps a bag of Story Sticks in her purse, not only for her family, but for any time she is called in to substitute teach, especially noticing the amusement from adults and children alike. In fact, for Nancy’s family as well as for most of the other adoptive families, usually one or more children in the family requested to repeat or continue activities. The repeated activities encouraged more story talk, especially as the adoptees interlinked the adoption themes of the story and the games.

Besides quality time as a family, two adoptive families found opportunities to add to their children’s knowledge. Nancy told the story “The Widow Who Gathered Sticks” from the Maasai tribe of East Africa, chosen by her African American/Caucasian 17-year-old son.

When Nancy introduced, “This story is from East Africa...”:

[Her sons] wanted to figure out where this story came from, so they looked up...and they got the globe out and they looked...and since my one son was already on the computer

[for homework]...we got the old encyclopedias out and we looked up the Maasai and then we looked up Kenya and then they researched that a little bit and decided that was pretty cool before I even [told] the story. (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013)

Beyond knowledge about places and animals from the stories, Allison noted that playing the games developed skills related to telling a story. She recalled that Henry started the story, the oldest boy continued the story, the middle child told, and so on so that each member “took away” the spotlight from one so another could have center stage. Allison shared, “The boys thought they were...big time...telling their own story, that everyone was sitting there listening to each other....” Allison preferred the “Switched” game mostly for the high energy and silliness yet thought this game tested the boy’s skills more. “My kids for the most part were really engaged, which is saying a lot, especially my oldest guy.” The 4-year-old did not want to finish the story and Henry said the boy usually says “alright one more thing, and one more thing and one more thing.” Henry and Allison intervened and connected the elements of the story from the beginning to the end of the story (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

All the adoptive parents noticed the reactions of their children to the games and stories, which is one of the attributes of being an ideal attachment figure as explained by Frude and Killick (2011). With sensing the listener’s attitudes, the ideal parent would adapt the storytelling and game playing. Before telling “The Magic Fish Hook” story, Julie’s daughter had a request and said, “Mom, do voices and tell it like Rachel did.” When Julie got animated, she noticed that she held her daughter’s attention better. Julie said the most intense moment in the story was when Maui pulled the islands from the sea. She recalled, “There was the fighting and the mountains came up and I was explaining how the islands split and she was like ‘Whoa!’...with

all the trying to be dramatic with that part, she really enjoyed that.” At first, Julie shared that her initial thought was that her daughter would not be interested in the game because of her young age and lack of understanding. Julie realized, “But children just love fun, and she was right into the story, right into the game” (Julie, personal communication, February 7, 2013).

In this section I identified two attachment propositions with the last one combining three of the four behaviors of attachment. These three behaviors combined were quality of time spent together versus quantity of time; contribution to child development; and the parent being an aware and adaptable ideal attachment figure. Next, I analyze the opportunity for cultural adjustment with this storytelling and game playing experience.

### **Cultural Adjustment**

Adoptees could have an adoption culture as well as an ethnic culture to blend into the adoptive family. Five of the adoptive families mentioned the motivation of the adoptees to explore their adoption backgrounds. All but one of these five families noted their adopted children also desiring to explore their ethnic backgrounds. These families of biracial and international adoptions already participated in cultural socialization activities. Except for the families of Nancy and that of Henry and Allison, these families expressed a greater need to explore other cultures rather than their children’s cultures-of-origins.

With those areas in mind, I made the following propositions:

- Adoption folktales and games impact adoptee personal identity more than cultural identity;
- Adoptees with unsettled identities experience an increased interest in the adoption folktales.

## **Adoptee Personal Identity**

I share examples of piqued curiosity about adoptee personal identity in connection with the first cultural adjustment proposition. Nancy's 17-year-old son's interest in the story background was one of the few occasions Nancy saw some level of intrigue related to his adoption background. Nancy described her son as "ambivalent about being adopted." She explained, "We told him early on, but he just didn't seem very interested in it and I think that comes from being raised in an adopted family. Everybody was adopted here. [My kids]...were surprised to find out that not everybody adopted." Nancy also wondered if hearing her on the telephone with birth mothers and adoptive couples became such an everyday occurrence for her youngest son that he did not need to know more. She continued, "In fact, the first time he really even asked me about anything was about 2 weeks ago, like 'What was my birth mother like?' 'What was her name?'" (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013).

Henry remembered, "Both of [the boys] actually made comments about their birth mothers during the telling of the story" (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013). Allison's biggest contribution to the story occurred when Henry "skipped past the part where...the kids reunited with their biological families, and I was like, 'hello, that's like a huge thing that our kids would connect with'" (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

Their boys see their different parents throughout the year depending on distance. One boy sees his birth mother in Virginia about four times a year with Skype calls about once a month. They exchange packages and pictures with the birth parents once a month as well, with occasional messages sent through texting or Facebook. Allison stated, "[The boys] need to know where they came from, and why they were placed, and that their birth parents loved them and wanted them, that they were always wanted." She explained that their family purposely uses



language associated with genealogy, heritage, and the adoption world to boost their boy's understanding and identity. Naturally, the family was used to discussions; the parents asked questions of the boys (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

Henry recalled:

We kind-a followed up after the story and talked a little bit about... 'what do you think about him not knowing who his birth mom was until he was older' .... They didn't have a lot of reaction, but they did mention that they enjoy knowing who their birth parents are already, and stuff like that. (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Due to this small sample, no generalizations can be made about the impact of cultural identity versus adoptee personal identity. However, there is a strong indication that adoption folktales and games impacted adoption identity more than cultural identity. Within that adoption identity was one of Dunbar's categories: unsettled identities (Grotevant et al., 2007).

### **Unsettled Identities**

Two of the parents stated that at least one of their adopted children had unsettled identities because they were adopted. Lori's 9-year-old son did not know anything about his birth mother and had always wanted to find her. He faced an impossible quest much like Chen Xiang in the Chinese adoption folktale. Lori noted that her son talked about the story more often than her 6-year-old girl and her 11-year-old son. This 9-year-old's favorite part was when Chen Xiang found his birth mother and rescued her from the mountain. Lori said she knew that her son wished to do that same feat in real life. Lori explained, "My middle child was most interested [in the story] than the others. He liked how [the story] ended happy with the boy finding his mother." She described her middle child as having a combination of limited and unsettled feelings towards adoption. He has felt more anger that, Lori said, "stems from being given

away.” Lori had no information to give her son about his full name or actual birth date. All they know is that he came from Mexico. One day, her son asked, “I wonder if my birth mother likes spicy foods?” This question prompted Lori and her husband to hire a private investigator to discover anything they could. So far nothing has come to light. Yet, his siblings enjoy consistent—albeit different in frequency—visits or communication with their birth parents. His youngest sibling has a very open adoption with chats several times a week between her and her birth parents. The birth parents even came over for last year’s Thanksgiving festivities. The oldest child has family that lives on the other side of the United States although there is still consistent contact.

Most of the parents said that their adopted children aged 5 and older (with ages 8 and older being the most prevalent) had integrated identities (Grotevant et al., 2007). As interpreted from the parents’ interviews, these adopted children with integrated identities reflected typical engagement I have seen as a professional storyteller. These “integrated” adoptees showed their interest in the stories through their: (1) body position of leaning forward and/or relatively still dependent on the age of the listener; (2) facial expressions with widened eyes and smiles to indicate excitement or favorite parts of the stories; and (3) increased energy or even a sound best described as a “buzz” after experiencing the storytelling by wanting to hear more stories. The parents who identified a child as having “unsettled identity” had more dramatic displays of emotions ranging from hope for the story character’s adoptee and birth parent relationship and the frustration and anger for feeling a lack of this adoptee and birth parent relationship in their own lives. Regardless of how these parents labeled their children’s identities, Grotevant et al. (2007) stated that no type was “more healthy” than another.

Lori and Kathleen shared the wish to be in touch with birth parents—even if all they had was a binder of information. They also shared the reality that even the best of detective work may not unearth answers. Seeing her middle child’s interest in the Chinese story sparked some concern. Lori explained, “I worry that some stories could give false hope of finding birth parents or having relationships with birth parents.” She continued that at least “the stories could get conversations flowing.” She concluded that the best age group for these stories and conversations were the 8 to 10-year-olds (third-fifth graders). She noted, “Their ears are more open as well as their imaginations....” She also attributed personality as being a factor of willingness to listen. Lori added that besides looking at these stories only for international adoptions, “[these stories] could help [biracial adoptions] in the United States for several generations” (Lori, personal communication, December 6, 2012). She alluded to the adaptability of these adoption folktales. I next discuss the responses of the participants concerning the adaptability of folktales for cultural identity followed by the adaptability of folktales for adoptee identity.

### **Adaptability of Folktales for Cultural Identity**

Allison enjoyed the idea of her oldest son connecting with his heritage. For example, he has Ukrainian ancestry because his birth mother is half Ukrainian. If adoptive parents happen to know the ancestry, then they could talk about the country, the culture, and “especially folktales that have been passed down, that were probably passed among [the adopted child]’s ancestors...I think that would be cool, to help him understand more about where he came from” (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

Kathleen contended, “The stories don’t have to be your own” as in of your own culture. An adoptee from China, like her daughter, did not need to listen to only Chinese stories (Kathleen, personal communication, December 6, 2012). Whitney agreed, “The different cultures

of the stories can [help us] remember or realize other worlds that we haven't lived through" (Whitney, personal communication, February 7, 2013). Lori stated that the adoption folktales helped adoptees learn about their culture, but that biracial children born in the United States could link to their heritage for several generations. As Kathleen and Whitney already immersed their children in cultural events, they chose to tell a story that did not connect to their children's culture-of-origin despite having that option of the 12 selected adoption folktales.

According to Vonk et al.'s (2010) cultural socialization study, parents of a child of a different ethnicity already chose reading to their children daily as the most popular way for their children to learn about their culture-of-origin. Of the five families in this study who had biracial or international adoptees, Kathleen's and Lori's families purposely avoided telling a story that matched ethnicities of their children, despite having that option. These same families indicated that they saw folktales as adaptable toward helping children strengthen their adoptee identity.

Nancy, after discussing with her family, said:

I think [these stories] are very adaptable....My family was saying that there are certain things that can identify across all cultures....It did pique their interest in these cultures and [ask] 'why do they have stories like this' and even though [these stories] have different cultures, they still are teaching their children the same things. (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013)

As David has three 14-year-olds, he sought for ways to converse.

He said:

Well, this has helped me to open up—because I've got teenagers. I feel like that my kids sometimes think that my wife and I preach to them, that when we want something that we spend too much time on going over something when they just want a short answer or a

short explanation and we spend a lot of time going through it when they've already got the point....But I don't think that they will feel like that if I use a short story now. And to use a short story from a different culture will...add more flavor to our family. (David, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Julie said that the telling of folktales was a less intimidating way to declare "This is where you're from." She explained, "[The adoptees] can take themselves out of [the story], which frees them, I think, to identify with the character but not have to have it be that 'I'm answering this' and have that pressure" (Julie, personal communication, February 7, 2013).

Being an elementary school principal, Jason could see these folktales as a teaching tool beyond the home and in the classroom to be used by the students to learn about cultures outside of their own. He has seen professional storytellers perform in assemblies and seen this at work. Jason said, "If of a certain age, the kids can interpret the moral....I could see effective teaching moments" (Jason, personal communication, February 7, 2013).

All the adoptive parents said the adoption folktales as being effective regardless of the culture-of-origin. Next, I share how these same participants saw the strength of adaptability for personal adoptee identity.

### **Adaptability of Folktales for Adoptee Identity**

The stories focus on the perspective of the adoptive parents despite often following the adventures of their adopted child for the rest of the plot. Whitney said, "I would like to find more adoptee point-of-view stories." At the same time, she added, "It is nice to know what the parents were thinking. Like for Isis [in the Egyptian story], I thought it nicely took us inside what a birth mother feels as she had Horus" (Whitney, personal communication, February 7, 2013).

Kathleen suggested, “Perhaps work with an adoption caseworker and pinpoint issues.” One issue she found was the “biological is best” feeling in some stories. She urged, “Have the stories relate better to adoptees and avoid biological being the happy ending. The stories could help with attachment issues—biological versus adopted family (Kathleen, personal communication, December 6, 2012).

Allison stated:

I actually think that some of them could reinforce a negative stereotype of adoption that, like with ours, if it was told in a different context, like the [story] we did about the gardener’s wife [from Colombia], their children were adopted under false pretenses, that their birth parents didn’t really know what was going on, that they were stolen from their birth parents or something like that...If you’re willing to dive into those harder topics with older kids [like preteens and teenagers], I think it could bring up some good, although hard, conversation[s]. (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Due to adoption policies and laws changing, Allison said that all but one of the stories have the ability to reinforce a negative stereotype. Most adoptions are not closed adoptions and folktales focus on exactly that: closed adoptions. Allison cautioned, “Just because even like 10 years ago, adoptions were totally closed, so even hearing stories about things that happened 10 years ago would be out-of-date.” She stated that she felt a conflict—either changing the story to work for adoptions today or choosing the story to represent the country-of-origin (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

She suggested saying this to an adoptee helped:

You know this may be true of this story that was passed down, and this is what we’re supposed to learn from this story, but does that sound like your adoption story? No! Your

birth parents knew that you were going to your adoptive family and they wanted you to go there and we didn't find you floating down a river....Your birth family specifically picked us and interviewed us and got to know us and felt that you would be the best 'you' if you were in our family. (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Henry shared:

You know, as I was reading some of the stories, to be honest, I would try to adapt any of them to what our children's understanding of adoption is....A lot of these stories are older folktales that may not quite fit into our children's experience....If we were focusing on 'this is a story that has a lot to do with you', I think we'd have to adapt some of [the stories] quite a bit. Now if, you know, you're just talking about a story about 'this is what somebody else's life is like', then I think that adaptations may be less necessary. I think our kids understand the difference between a story that is happening to somebody else and that there are differences in other people's experiences...other than they just have to understand every story from their own perspective. (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Henry stated that a lot of the stories dealt with manipulation or a "real evil" and these "darker lines directly from the story" could turn into this type of conversation with a child, "Even though some terrible things may have happened or somebody just sent a child down a river, you can still adapt that or draw a correlation" (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

Henry suggested the following parent dialogue:

Well, this is similar to what your birth mom did. She wanted you to be safe out of harm, and so she sent you down the river but she knew where we were, she knew we were at the end of the river.... (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Nancy also pondered on the image of the baby floating down the river. She did not want adoptees being fearful that such a thing would happen to them or perhaps taken away from the home they know. She wondered about the moment in “The Gardener’s Wife” at the end when the biological and the adoptive families live together (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013).

She responded:

Being a caseworker, I’m thinking ‘Hmmm.’ I don’t know if that would work—worked for them [in the story] but I wouldn’t want to give [adoptees] the false impression that one day they’re going to find their birth mothers and she’s going to come and live by their home. (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013)

Lori echoed the same feelings as Nancy about how the stories could open conversations and yet she worried that “some stories could give false hope of finding birth parents or having relationships with birth parents” (Lori, personal communication, December 6, 2013). David’s dialogue with his children, he determined, could be—not necessarily through adoption folktales—but telling them how important he and his wife think of them, sharing personal childhood stories, and telling them about their adoptions.

When given more time to reflect, Nancy had another view:

All adoption is based on grief and loss, whether it’s the birth mother, the adopting couple, or the child—it’s all grief and loss. I think that needs to be addressed, the feelings of that



need to be addressed. Maybe folktales would be a good way to do it. (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013)

As an example, Nancy considered “The Woman Who Gathered Sticks” from the Maasai tribe and one she had shared with three of her children. The poor woman found the 12 children and loved them unconditionally. Nancy commented, “My kids totally understood that she was someone who was willing to love them unconditionally and that’s a huge part of adoption. Or just having any kids, biological or adoptive, it’s a huge part of it” (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013). Julie remarked, “What’s so great about stories and why I really enjoyed this whole experience, is that you can teach about something that someone’s feeling....but not like [you’re] sitting down with a counselor, where it’s ‘open up and tell me how you’re feeling’. It’s kind-of a side-way in, and more comfortable” (Julie, personal communication, February 7, 2013).

Everyone except for Allison saw these adoption folktales as being relatable for adoptees in regards to the modern-day adoption process. Eight adoptive parents said that children could connect to what was the same and appreciate any differences within the stories. Next I share their predictions for the role of storytelling in their families.

### **Predictions of Role of Storytelling in Family**

Finally, the adoptive parents were asked the following question: “Before the ‘Year of the Adopted Family’ workshop, what was your experience with storytelling? In 1 year, how do you see storytelling playing a role in your adoptive family, if at all? Five years? Ten years?”

Six of the nine parents either promised or expected storytelling activities to continue in the next year. By the fifth year, four of these parents felt confident that storytelling would still play an important role. Allison and David hesitated, yet still affirmed that storytelling could be a visible

part of their family's life. Approaching the 10<sup>th</sup> year, Allison and Henry as well as Jason said their children would be old enough to appreciate and tell better stories as well as themselves. This prediction included Jason thinking storytelling would continue in 1 year's time and, instead, supported the idea of storytelling becoming a stronger impact with time. Though positive about the usefulness of the art, Nancy and Whitney felt hopeful rather than resolute that storytelling would become a generational tradition by the end of 10 years.

All the parents considered the ages and personalities of their children for predicting storytelling role in the future. David, Julie, and Lori stated that children aged 8 to 12 were the most effective audiences for storytelling in the home. Jason and Whitney said teenagers to adults brought greater understanding and presentation skills to the art. Henry and Allison as well as Nancy said storytelling could be equally powerful for all generations; these same three parents already experienced multigenerational storytelling within their families.

Nancy expected to tell stories and play games again. She added, "We talked about doing it for a Family Home Evening and maybe getting all the older kids together and doing it, so we'll probably do it three or four more times in a year." In 5 years Nancy anticipated telling these stories and others to her grandchildren. "We will try to incorporate it into a lot of family activities and put down the iPads and phone and everything" (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013).

Finally, in 10 years, Nancy predicted:

Well, if I'm still alive in 10 years, probably hopefully my grown children will be [telling stories] in their families and will still be doing it together with our grandchildren. I also would like to get some of these stories, you know, printed off and maybe do some work with my adoptive couples with them, maybe looking for other sources, too, and just look

for this in other ways and means to do this....I see it being a role not just with my family but with other adoptive families that I work with, too. (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013)

David said that in the next year he could collect and tell short stories to encourage one of his sons to open up more. He also saw that stories with morals could help with discipline. In 5 years, his two older triplets will likely be going to college or serving missions for 2 years. David stated that at least for now he has an influence in molding their character. He did not know what the role of storytelling would be like when left for his boys to decide. In 10 years, David said storytelling would not be as important when the boys are no longer at home. He hoped that whenever his boys needed to make decisions, they could ponder, “There’s got to be a story here that Dad can tell me to help me get through this problem....That’s what I would like to see” (David, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

One of the games played by Whitney’s family was “A Gathered Story a.k.a. Story Sticks” shared at the workshop.

Whitney said:

[My son] chose words for the sticks-like: frog, whale, cat, turtle, mouse, window, jump, dog, bird, cow, llama (that was my word), fish light, school bus, snowman, dragon, duck, cooking, bag. He really likes this game. He asked if we could play again the day after. We played at least three times—he is always thinking of new words to add. (Whitney, personal communication, February 7, 2013)

The whole storytelling experience was new for Whitney though one prediction was certain to happen within 1 year. She declared, “We’ll have lots of Story Sticks!” She shared, “How a child tells a story gives insight in what the child’s thinking. Kids don’t always tell you directly.”

In 5 years, Whitney said she hoped that her son would be more coherent in his telling. She explained, “Like instead of only saying ‘Once upon a time’ each time, he could actually keep the same story for the whole game and not have too many tangents. Tangents aren’t bad, but to have a better flow.” When asked about the role of storytelling in 10 years, she exclaimed, “He will be 15 years old. Either he’ll be a master storyteller or he’ll think mom’s story obsession is stupid!” (Whitney, personal communication, February 7, 2013).

One of the married couples expressed differing views on storytelling’s role in 1,5, or 10 years. In the next year and on through 5 years, Julie said she saw herself taking more opportunities to tell stories with books now that she understands how to story-board and integrate games with stories during bedtime routines or car rides. Meanwhile, Jason shared that storytelling would not have much of a role in the family in the coming year, though he figured in 5 years, when their children are aged 11, 8, and 5, they would be better able to understand and learn about cultures through stories. Julie predicted that the storytelling role would decline in 10 years, with the children being past the average story-time age. She paused and wondered if her oldest daughter, who loves to write and create stories, would compete in storytelling events. Before this workshop, Julie was unaware of these opportunities for children. As for Jason, in 10 years he said he saw the children as being old enough to know how to use stories instead of purely listening.

Instead of Henry and Allison each telling a different story, they decided that Henry, already known as the regular storyteller in the home, would tell “The Charcoal Woman’s Son” from Cuba and then encourage Allison to add details as the story developed.

Henry related his family’s storytelling background:

My dad, a few years ago...he started a tradition for a little bit to tell stories before bedtime and just ask[ed] [our boys] what kind of story they wanted to hear and go for it. So, we do it quite a bit, and so yeah, stories are kind of something we do a lot around here and they enjoy it, especially the middle child. The oldest, he kinda likes to hear stories, and he'll give you the setup for the stories, but he's not so into modifying the stories or telling the stories himself. But our youngest...you could spend all night with him and he'll tell you all kinds of things and just keep going and going. (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

Allison wished that, in 1 year, her children could each tell their own adoption story. As of now, the boys mostly hear stories about the lives of Henry and Allison. Allison explained, "I'd like the roles to switch where they tell us more stories than we tell them...for helping with their identity" (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013). Henry stated that he knew storytelling would still be a big part of their family's lives. He said, "I think we teach our kids a lot of things through stories, whether they be real stories or imaginary stories." He anticipated at least weekly or monthly storytelling sessions, with the sessions being daily for his middle son, who has series of stories based around a magical house (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013). In 5 years time, Allison said she hoped that her two older boys would become involved with the local storytelling festival. Henry shared about the affect of his sons' personalities on the role of storytelling in their lives in 5 years.

He said that when his oldest was 10 years old:

He may be too cool to sit down with Dad and make up silly stories. More writing might be involved. He's already a pretty good reader and stuff, so it may take different forms. He may be more involved in school activities that have to do with storytelling or

drama...things like that. So I could just see that [storytelling] might look different. But again, especially with our second son, I don't imagine that his imagination and desire to make up different worlds and things like that, I don't see that that's gonna change too much in the next 5 years. (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013)

When the boys attend high school in 10 years, Allison said she aspired to see the boys being able to not only share their personal adoption stories but also to “have the language to talk about it with their peers” (Allison, personal communication, February 18, 2013). Henry figured that by then everyone—boys and parents alike—would have built repertoires with many personal stories to tell. He reflected, “That’s a big part of my family, whenever we get together, it’s rehashing funny stories or...stupid things that we’ve done....” (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013). Then generations will celebrate those times.

I noticed that the multigenerational storytelling families expressed the most confidence that storytelling would continue. They already had that tradition established and maintained so those families embraced the request to tell adoption folktales and to play games. A few parents new to the art still envisioned storytelling being a strong part of the family’s traditions. For example, Whitney wondered how his son would develop in 10 years with this new obsession called “storytelling.” Such fervor could fade and a professional storyteller who combined efforts with a therapist could fuel that passion by providing regular performances with the same adoptive family. The professional storyteller could also encourage workshop and performance attendees to create their own adoptive support groups in this art.

Ideas will continue to develop as more and more workshops are conducted beyond this study. These results came about through the help of two pilot programs and two evaluated workshops. I recognized the participants’ choices for stories and games and what that meant in

regards to sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment. I shared the feelings that the participants had in the adaptability of the adoption folktales for cultural and adoptee identity. The last part of results elaborated on the participants' predictions as to the role of storytelling in their homes in the next 1, 5, and 10 years. These results allow conclusions to be related as well as implications for future study in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

*For 7 years, not a word was spoken. The old couple yearned to tell their neighbors of the wondrous son who now blessed their lives. But oh—they feared if word spread of the miracle, their now adopted son would be taken and never seen again (retold from Bierhorst, 2002, “Littlebit”).*

Adoption folktales have remained a secret—hushed and hidden—like Littlebit in the above Chilean story. However, more than those 7 years have passed. Journals and academic works publish few surveys about adoptive families, even with open adoption becoming the norm for the past 2 decades. Littlebit eventually received permission from his adoptive parents to adventure into the wide world and make the way easier for his family. I aim for these 12 selected adoption folktales to accomplish that same purpose with the added benefit of providing tools for adoptive parents to assist in sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustments with their adopted children. These areas, in turn, increase story talk in the home while adoptees reflect on their personal adoptee identities as well as their cultural identities.

The study provides qualitative, though nongeneralizable support for the following propositions:

- Sensemaking for the parents increases when the stories and/or games are demonstrated before being shared in the home;
- Parents still choose to tell stories that include harsh details when they feel the freedom to adapt the stories as they see fit for their adopted children;
- Parents consider age and personality of their children when choosing how to present the stories;



- Parents feel more secure telling the stories and playing the games when they have already experienced performance storytelling;
- Attachment between parent and child increases with the quality time spent through storytelling and games;
- Story talk increases with adoptive families with adoption-career-parent(s) as the experience influences use of stories and games in their home as well as adoptive and birth families known through work;
- Story games in combination with the adoption folktales provide synergistic and effective tools that can increase story talk within the home;
- Adoption folktales and games impact adoptee personal identity more than cultural identity;
- Adoptees with unsettled identities experience an increased interest in the adoption folktales;
- Most parents predict higher confidence in storytelling's role and importance in their children's lives within 1 year;
- More parents express lower confidence in storytelling's role and importance in their children's lives in 5 to 10 years;
- Adoptive families already experiencing multigenerational storytelling have a greater probability of continuing storytelling's role for present and future generations.

### **Implications for Further Study**

Further work along these lines might be designed to show what encourages story talk. For example, sensemaking reveals itself in many forms including the use of symbols, story motifs, and character types. The adoptive parents hinted at these symbols such as the river and sending a

babe afloat in a basket. Allison remembered the Moses story after hearing the Colombian story “The Gardener’s Wife.” Henry thought of that same story when he shared views on the adaptability of the folktales. He explained a hypothetical conversation with an adoptee, “This is similar to what your birth mom did. She wanted you to be safe out of harm, and you know, so she sent you down the river but she knew where we were, she knew we were at the end of the river....” (Henry, personal communication, February 18, 2013).

Parents may be intrigued by the symbols, motifs, and character types found within each story. Children will see these things according to their levels of development. While a 5-year-old may see symbols as a fun reminder of the story, older children may be able to gain insight into the metaphoric depths of that image. The next time the child sees a river, that same child might tell that story or at least mention a character or scene from the story that featured a river.

This research had too short a timeframe to determine the impact of these stories and games on a long-term scale. Plus, the small sample size allows me no generalizations. I can validate that when the words “mountain” or “axe” randomly emerge in our conversations, my boys talk about “Chen Xiang Chopped the Mountain”. The name is too hard to pronounce so “Chen Xiang” usually becomes “that boy”. Nancy’s 17-year-old son as well as her adult children delved deep into “story talk” by relating orphan and adopted characters throughout literary history. Certainly, this same family could talk about symbols, themes, and character types with a greater focus if provided the tools (Nancy, personal communication, February 7 and 11, 2013).

Another study could provide parents with a list of talking points tailored to each folktale with the focus on sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment. Then, follow-up questions could be along the lines of, “Tell me more about the family discussion involving the talking points. What did you find most interesting and why? What did you find least helpful and why?

What natural discussions came about, if at all, as a result of this first discussion?” If the parents are given a copy of the interview questions beforehand, they will know that the story, game, and discussion are expected. For this study I debated whether to require the parents to lead a discussion with their children after the storytelling and games. However, I wished to know what conversations would have surfaced naturally. As I discovered in my study, some parents love to have the freedom to share what they wish with their children, while some parents prefer to be told step-by-step how to approach these stories and games.

An additional study could be a comparative project involving parents who use the Dunbar’s four major categories of adoptee identities with particular interest in unsettled identities. With a larger sample of participants, we could see a clearer relationship, if any, between unsettled identity and the amount and quality of story talk. Are there certain stories that these adoptees connect with more than others? Parents and adoptees could answer the same interview questions to understand better the parent-storyteller and the adoptee-listener roles in connection with adoptee identities. The age of the adopted child would determine the level of comprehension and response to the interview.

Other future studies need to compare parents’ backgrounds and experiences with performance storytelling and what difference, if any, that these events make to the results of storytelling in the home. Some areas around the world are friendlier to youth storytelling than others. Almost all the storytelling festivals in Utah have a youth component that involves participation from whole school districts rather than a simple call for auditions. Some school districts in Utah have specifically added storytelling as part of the core curriculum. For example, every student in the Morgan School District develops a story in connection with the Weber State University Storytelling Festival and the top tellers perform at the festival level. Many areas of the

world do not promote youth storytelling let alone incorporate it as part of educational standards. My two Idaho participants had no experience with the art. Yet, five out of the seven Utah participants had seen performance storytelling through school assemblies or festivals.

After consulting with more adoptive parents beyond the Utah/Idaho area, I have decided to work alongside caseworkers and social workers on heightening connections with adoptive families. I will continue to perform these stories and other adoption folktales that best reflect the feedback received from adoptive parents and caseworkers. As a professional storyteller, I will continue these workshops for adoptive families. Finally, I will adapt these stories for the general public in order to introduce and encourage awareness of adoption as a natural and positive choice. Amongst these audiences will be those directly connected to and involved with adoption, and my storytelling for the general public will be personalized for those individuals.

After this study I will collect foster care folktales that focus on a sequential process that begins with reunification—returning of the children to their birth parents—and continues then to address transitions from foster care to adoption. Once these stories are gathered, we need to gather adoption and foster care caseworkers to review and offer adaptations in order for the stories to be more appropriate for use within specific homes. This same enthusiasm could be used to find adoption folktales for each of the top 20 international adoption placements in the United States [see Appendix G]. I encourage any professional storytellers, foster care caseworkers, or parents to assist with this gathering of tales. To start this effort, I will publish these 12 adoption folktales and 37 story games. Then, in the near future, I will also publish related books on foster care folktales.

The responses from these nine adoptive parents verify that storytelling and games provide a viable tool for adoptive families to use for sensemaking, attachment, and cultural adjustment

with their adopted children. All the parents agreed that this was quality time well spent with their children. A few felt nervous about telling a story without a book, though these parents achieved the confidence needed to look their children in the eye and enjoy the experience. The games brought a creative atmosphere that synergized the effectiveness of the stories increased the amount of story talk. Multigenerational storytelling families could continue to share adoption folktales and games as part of their established traditions. Meanwhile, first-generational storytelling families could transform into multigenerational storytelling families and perpetuate the art for years to come.

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## APPENDIX A

Basic Info of Adoptive Families Interviewed (Names changed to maintain confidentiality)

Family	Age(s)	Employment	Religion	Child(ren)
Nancy -Caucasian -Married	58 years	Director of Social Work- Adoptions	LDS	6 Adopted Children 30-year-old girl, Caucasian/Native American 28-year-old girl, Caucasian 26-year-old boy, Thailand 25-year-old boy 24-year-old boy 17-year-old boy, African American/Caucasian
David -Caucasian -Married	57 years	Software Product Analyst	LDS	3 Adopted Children 2 Biological Children 31-year-old boy, Caucasian, bio 26-year-old boy, Caucasian, bio 14-year-old boy, Caucasian 14-year-old boy, Caucasian 14-year-old boy, Caucasian
Kathleen -Caucasian -Single	52 years	Operation Manager- Adoptions	Catholic	1 Adopted Children 12-year-old girl, Chinese
Lori -Caucasian -Married	40 years	Housewife/Head of Biracial Support Group	Protestant	3 Adopted Children 11-year-old boy, Black/Caucasian 9-year-old boy, Mexican/Black 6-year-old girl, Caucasian/Black
Whitney -Caucasian -Married	39 years	Software Developer	All and None	1 Adopted Children 5-year-old boy, Ethiopian
Jason & Julie -Caucasian -Married	33 & 34 years	Principal- Elementary & Wife/Mother	LDS	3 Adopted Children 6-year-old girl, Caucasian 2-year-old girl, Caucasian 3-week-old girl, Caucasian
Henry & Allison -Caucasian -Married	33 & 33 years	Director of Social Work- Adoptions & Blogger/Jeweler- Adoptions	LDS	3 Adopted Children 5-year-old boy, Black/Eastern European/Caucasian 4-year-old boy, Black/Mexican/Greek/Caucasian 3 ½-month boy, Colombian/Caucasian

## APPENDIX B

### Questions for Telephone Interview

1. Share about the moment when you decided to adopt. Is this moment different when you chose to adopt internationally? If so, explain.
  - a. Expand upon the most intense moment of the adoption process.
  - b. Relate about the day that your adopted child was placed with you.
  - c. Tell about your transition as an adoptive parent.
2. Nora Dunbar shared four types of identity that an adoptive child may feel.
  - Unexamined identity, thought little and unconcerned about their adoption background;
  - Limited identity, began to explore and at least discussed with friends about adoption;
  - Unsettled identity, obsessed with adoption background and felt frustrated at not knowing enough;
  - Integrated identity, balanced view of adoption background with favorable feelings towards birth parents and adoptive parents.
  - a. Share what type(s) of adoptee identity you have seen with your child. Give examples.
  - b. Now share what type(s) of cultural identity you have seen with your child. Give examples.
3. How important, if at all, is how your child feels about being adopted?
4. How important, if at all, is how your child feels about their ethnicity?
5. Tell about a time your child expressed a difference in ethnicity. How did you respond, if at all? Why?
6. What did your adopted child like most about the (country/tribe) folktale? Why?
7. What cultural game/activity did your adopted child like most? Why?
8. What were the strengths of the “Year of the Adopted Family” performance/workshop? Weaknesses?
9. How adaptable, if at all, are using folktales—regardless of origin—to teach:
  - a. Cultural identity? Why?
  - b. Adoptee identity? Why?
10. Before the “Year of the Adopted Family” workshop, what was your experience with storytelling? In 1 year, how do you see storytelling playing a role in your adoptive family, if at all? Five years? Ten years?  
***Any last comments about this experience?***

## APPENDIX C

Table of Stories Chosen

Family	Story Chosen	Heard in Workshop?	Notes
Nancy	The Widow Who Gathered Sticks, Maasai  <i>plus</i>	Yes	Transformed into a family project instigated by the listeners to find the globe, see East Africa, and learned bits of trivia online of exactly where the story came from
	The Charcoal Woman's Son, Cuba  <b>Audience:</b> 17-yr-old-in-person 26-yr-old-in-person 30-yr-old-by phone Husband-in-person	No	Led to discussion by family about all the great literature out there that feature orphaned or adopted children such as Anne of Green Gables, Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, etc.
David	The Widow Who Gathered Sticks, Maasai  <b>Audience:</b> 3 14-year-olds	Yes	Father debated with himself to share story due to part where girl is slapped by wealthy woman because youngest son was abused by birth mother but the father decided to share anyway
Kathleen	The Gardener's Wife, Colombia  <b>Audience:</b> 12-year-old	Yes	Changed ending to avoid "Biological is best" feeling and daughter liked ending better
Lori	Chen Xiang Chopped the Mountain, China  <b>Audience:</b> 6-year-old 9-year-old 11-year-old	Yes	Caught interest in story mostly by the middle child, who has some unsettled feelings towards birth parents, especially in the story when the son finds and saves the birth mother

Whitney	<p>The Wanderings of Isis, Egypt</p> <p><b>Audience:</b> 5-year-old Husband</p>	No	Inspired the child to be curious about scorpions, pictures shown as a result, as well as lingering thoughts by child about the mean woman who would not help the birth mother
Jason & Julie	<p>The Boy of the Red Sky, Canada First Nation</p> <p><i>plus</i></p> <p>The Magic Fish Hook, New Zealand</p> <p><b>Audience:</b> 6-year-old</p>	<p>No</p> <p>No</p>	<p>Laughed when Dad shared how the baby was found in a sea shell</p> <hr/> <p>Requested that Mom tell the story using voices like how Rachel did during the workshop plus the child expressed greatest delight when the islands exploded from the sea</p>
Henry & Allison	<p>The Charcoal Woman's Son, Cuba</p> <p><b>Audience:</b> 5-year-old 4-year-old 3 ½-month-old</p>	No	Chose for Dad to be main storyteller while Mom added details here and there plus opened opportunity for parents to discuss adoption issues

## APPENDIX D

Table of Games Chosen

Family	Game(s) Chosen	Played in Workshop?	Notes
Nancy	A Gathered Story— a.k.a. Story Sticks (Maasai Section)  <i>plus</i>	Yes	Anticipated to do two rounds but everyone had so much fun that they did four rounds and had to force themselves to stop plus Nancy now keeps Story Sticks in bag so it is on hand for substitute teaching or other ventures
	Last Word, First Word (China Section)  <b>Audience:</b> 17-yr-old 26-yr-old Husband  <b>Order:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story—one night</li> <li>• Games—another night with Story Sticks first followed by Last Word, First Word</li> </ul>	No	<hr/> Discovered how hard this game was and the lines shared focused more on feelings than a story plus family decided to adapt rules to allow to start with “The” or “A” instead of the actual last word first
David	Switched! (Colombia Section)  <i>plus</i>	Yes	Surprised by active participation by one of the boys who usually feels “too old for games” and yet loved this one
	A Gathered Story— a.k.a. Story Sticks (Maasai Section)  <b>Audience:</b> 3 14-year-olds  <b>Order:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story</li> <li>• Switched!</li> </ul>	Yes	<hr/> Continued surprise as all the boys enjoyed creating a story that lasted for 3-4 rounds with imaginative and well-thought out twists

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story Sticks</li> </ul>		
Kathleen	Last Word, First Word (China Section)  <b>Audience:</b> 12-year-old Plus 2 friends of child	Yes	Played while in the car with laughter and enjoyment by the child and her friends
Lori	Last Word, First Word (China Section)  <b>Audience:</b> 9-year-old	Yes	Experienced playing a game like this for the first time that had plenty of silliness
Whitney	Last Word, First Word (China Section)  <i>plus</i>  A Gathered Story— a.k.a. Story Sticks (Maasai Section)  <b>Audience:</b> 5-year-old Husband  <b>Order:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Story</li> <li>• Last Word, First Word</li> <li>• Story Sticks</li> </ul>	No	Remembered a moment in the story heard before playing this game and added that to this game as a line
		Yes	<hr/> Asked to play the game the day after learning it and played three times before the interview plus the child always thought about words to add for the Story Sticks
Jason & Julie	Chance (Canada Section)  <i>plus</i>  Fishing for Islands (Polynesian Section)  <b>Audience:</b> 6-year-old 2-year-old	No	Decided that someday they will need to create a story about bears and eagles as a result
		No	<hr/> Requested by oldest to play again and reminded mother that children understand stories and fun
Henry & Allison	Switched! (Colombia section)	Yes	Turned into a game of seeing if the kids could “mess Dad up”

	<p><i>plus</i></p> <p>Vines (Italy section)</p> <p><b>Order:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Switched</li> <li>• Story</li> <li>• Vines</li> </ul> <p><b>Audience:</b> 5-year-old 4-year-old</p>	No	<p>that was wild, loud, and fun and kids wanted to shout “Switched!” almost every other word until explained a couple times to wait at least a sentence</p> <hr/> <p>Nicknamed as “Takeaway” game where people added to the story and raised hand for whoever would be next and tested skills more in creating a coherent story</p>
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## APPENDIX E

Table of Predictions of Storytelling Role in Families

Family	Experience	After 1 year?	After 5 years?	After 10 years?
Nancy	Kids entered storytelling contest during elementary years, she coached them also drawing upon her drama background and advice from her brother who is a storyteller	Planned to do storytelling again as a family as a result of this experience, perhaps 3-4 times a year	Figured some iPads and phones would be set down to do some storytelling and may tell to grandkids at that time	Hoped she would tell stories to grandchildren while her children tell to their families while also using adoption folktales when working with adoptive couples
David	Attended storytelling festivals over 10 years ago and decided to tell some stories—so always telling stories to others but never to his family	Promised to make storytelling more a part of his family's traditions and build repertoire of 1-3-minute stories	Unsure as the boys will be graduated—thought might have a less important role	Saw storytelling being less important once the boys were no longer in the home but the art would still be around
Kathleen	Unavailable, too much noise on recording	Unavailable, too much noise on recording	Unavailable, too much noise on recording	Unavailable, too much noise on recording
Lori	No storytelling experience	Thought the stories could help with adoption issues with best age being 8-10-year-olds and based on personality of child	Probably won't be part of daughter's life as she would be phasing out	None
Whitney	Never did storytelling before, always would read stories	"In 1 year, we'll have lots of story sticks!" Foresaw chance	Thought son would tell more coherent stories and focus on the	"Either he'll be a master storyteller or he'll think

		for son to tell her his feelings indirectly through stories	same story for all the rounds of a game	Mom's story obsession is stupid!"
Jason & Julie	<p>Jason— Saw 2-3 storytellers do assemblies at his school and said "Storytelling hits closest to home and in the classroom."</p> <p>Julie— Attended story times at the library a couple times, read book before and tried to use voices and inflections, nothing with "real" storytelling</p>	<p>Jason— Not a lot</p> <p>Julie— Thought more stories will be told without a book now and will do bedtime and car stories as well as integrating games within and around the telling of these stories</p>	<p>Jason— Figured the stories could be used to understand cultures more</p> <p>Julie— Saw as about the same as the first year</p>	<p>Jason— Felt that his kids finally reached an age that they could use stories more</p> <p>Julie— Thought storytelling would play less of a role though now she knows about storytelling competitions and her girls, especially her writer, may be interested</p>
Henry & Allison	<p>Henry— Influenced by his Dad and also tells stories for his family during bedtime at least once a week and asks kids if want real or fake story</p> <p>Allison— Taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade for 4 years and encouraged students to audition for local storytelling festival plus volunteered to help at a storytelling conference</p>	<p>Henry— Saw continuation of weekly or at least monthly storytelling activities such as bedtime stories</p> <p>Allison— Liked for kids to switch roles and tell more stories than the parents, start to be able to share their adoption stories</p>	<p>Henry— Predicted that third boy will then get involved in telling stories and the older kids may use story but in the same or in other forms</p> <p>Allison— Hoped that oldest boy will get involved more with the storytelling festival</p>	<p>Henry— Thought he and wife would have more personal stories to share with kids by then</p> <p>Allison— Kids would be in high school and will have the language to tell their own adoption stories (though hopes not telling too many stories!)</p>

## APPENDIX F

### Story Games Included in Participant Binder



#### **Year of the Adopted Family: Cultural Socialization Games through Folktales**

Professional Storyteller Rachel Hedman

[www.rachelhedman.com](http://www.rachelhedman.com) •

[www.facebook.com/rachelfans](https://www.facebook.com/rachelfans)

#### **Objectives:**

- **Experience** a sampling of adoption folktales from around the world that reflect the modern-day adoption process.
- **Develop and Practice** one of the 12 selected adoption folktales through a story-board and sharing with a

partner before sharing with an adopted child.

- **Participate** in how to create and play story-based and story-inspired games to teach cultural elements to adopted children.

#### **Featured Stories**

1. Chile—Littlebit
2. Colombia—The Gardener's Wife
3. Maasai Tribe south of Ethiopia—The Widow Who Gathered Sticks

#### **Why Story Games?**

Children learn about cultures as they play. Besides socialization skills, the games teach creativity, increased vocabulary, and physical prowess. These particular games promote teamwork, cooperation, and the ability to listen and respect other people's ideas. When children have fun, the experience becomes more memorable. The values found within the stories and games can last for a lifetime.

#### **What about Shyness?**

Games and stories mean that you have given yourself permission to take risks. Dr. Kevin Cordi is famous for his "permission to play" with group and individual storytelling experiences. When a safe and inviting environment is developed where perfection is NOT expected, then shyness will melt away.

#### **Cultural Aspects to Create Story Games**

1. People—such as Political, Historical Figures
2. Place—such as Geography
3. Time—such as Dates, Timelines
4. Trends—such as Economics, Social, Religion
5. Traditional Games already of that Culture

## Places to Add Games

1. Before sharing story
2. Pauses within the story
  - a. Setting the scene before coming to the trouble part of the story
  - b. If a character goes to a marketplace, woods, journey
  - c. Part of the ending as celebrations and feasts tend to be referenced in the story
3. After sharing story
4. After reviewing the story the next day, week, etc.

## Special Thanks to Joanna Huffaker, artist of adoption images

### Customs and Traditions of Note in Asia: (see “Asian Tales and Tellers” by Cathy Spagnoli)

- Beckoning towards you with the palm up is only used for animals, not people
- Touching the head is avoided, as the head is a sacred part of a person
- Using prolonged eye contact with elders shows disrespect
- Touching or pointing with the feet-the lowest part of the body-is rude
- Pointing your finger directly at someone are used for scolding or insults



### China Story Games—Chen Xiang Chopped the Mountain

#### Caught You!

Geared for Ages 5+

#### *Traditional game*

With a blindfold and a ball, take a group of people and form a circle. One person is chosen as referee. Another person is asked to sit blindfolded in the middle of the circle.

- Referee gives ball to Player in the circle. The ball is passed around.
- The Blindfolded Person chooses when to say "stop".
- Referee makes sure that everyone freezes.
- Person with the ball must sing or tell a story.
- The Blindfolded Person is replaced about every 5 minutes or whatever time was deemed by the group before the game began.

#### Last Word-First Word

Geared for Ages 8+

#### *Inspired by Asian storytelling technique and word play*

With two or more people, play with whatever is the last word in a sentence. For example, the first person could say a line like, “The roses bloom beneath the peach trees.” The second person must use the last word in the line to start the next phrase such as saying, “Trees quivered as the wind blew.” Another person (or going back to the first person), someone could say, “Blew from the East, the wind did.” And so on. Create a story.

#### Lists, Lists, and More Lists

With two or more people, challenge as a pair or group on how many things you could list in a part of a story. You could decide on a story that

<p>Geared for Ages 8+</p> <p><i>Inspired by Asian storytelling technique and word play</i></p>	<p>all of you know or create a new one. Each person tells a few lines of the story and then passes onto the next person. An adult and/or referee can call at any time, “Lists, lists, and more lists!” When heard, the person in the middle of telling the story lists whatever connects to the story. For example, if someone said, “And she walked through a garden...” the list might include “with roses, tulips, brambles, peach trees, lilies, maple trees, vines, delightful benches, arches, and statues of jade”. The list needs to be at least 10 items long. The rest of the group or other half of the pair could count on their fingers. When the list is complete, then the story continues until complete.</p>
<p><b>Old One, God of Thunder, and Monkey King</b></p> <p>Geared for Ages 8+</p> <p><i>Inspired by story “Chen Xiang Chopped the Mountain”</i></p>	<p>Depending on the version, one of the following mentors Chen Xiang.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old One, Tai Shang Lao Jun (peacemaker, uses fan with ying yang)</li> <li>• God of Thunder, Lei Gong (punisher, uses drum and mallet)</li> <li>• Monkey King, Sun Wukong (trickster, uses magic wishing staff)</li> </ul> <p>Choose one person to tell a story. While talking, the person randomly says one of the three names. For example, “The woods darkened and...Monkey King!” The audience responds with motions of the fan, drum, or holding a staff with proper facial expressions for the personality.</p>

## Customs and Traditions of Note in Russia:

- Keep hands out of the pockets while talking or telling stories
- Avoid making the “OK” sign, as it is rude
- Using the word “Comrade” when speaking of Russians makes them cringe
- Always take off your gloves while shaking hands
- Never be late for any kind of engagement



Russia Story Games—Ivan the Cow’s Son	
<p><b>Last Couple Out!</b></p> <p>Geared for Ages 5+</p> <p><i>Traditional game</i></p>	<p>The game is best with 9 or more people (odd number) though three people could work. Everyone lines up in pairs facing the same direction including the “odd” person, who is in the front of the line. When the “odd” one shouts “Last Couple Out!”, the farthest couple from the “odd” person unlinks arms and approach—fast or slow—on either side of the line to the “odd” one. The “odd” person cannot look behind, only straight ahead. When the two people are even with the “odd” one, then they can be chased. The couple either links arms in front of the “odd” one or the “odd” one tags of the two people rushing forward and becomes a partner for them. Then the game starts over with the last couple approaching the new or continuing “odd” one.</p>
<p><b>Baba Yaga Game</b></p> <p>Geared for Ages 8+</p>	<p>One person is “Baba Yaga”, the matriarch witch of the Russian world. Another person pretends to knock on the chicken hut door of Baba Yaga. Baba Yaga opens the door and puts forth three “impossible” tasks. The</p>

<p><i>Inspired by classic Russian storytelling character</i></p>	<p>other person must figure out creative ways to complete those tasks. For example, Baba Yaga could say, “Dust every bit of rice.” The other person may respond with, “I call to a flock of birds and they agree to fly over the barrel of rice and dust them. I had always fed them bread after all!” If the person pauses too long (decide how long is too long) to figure out how to get past a Baba Yaga task, then Baba Yaga gets to pretend to eat them. Sound effects are encouraged.</p>
<p><b>Worse! Even Worse!</b></p> <p>Geared for Ages 8+</p> <p><i>Inspired by Russian view of children’s stories (realism mixed with optimism)</i></p>	<p>Many of the Russian stories tend to be grim, at least once a child has reached 8 years or older. There are still nursery rhymes and upbeat stories for the preschool-aged children. Yet, the Russians pride in showing how grim situations can be overcome in a realistic way. So for this game, you need at least two people. One person tells a few lines of a story. The other person or if there are other people could say “Worse! Even Worse!” at any time. When said, the story is paused and the storyteller makes the situation worse in the story. For example, someone could have said, “The boy traveled through the forest and...” “Worse! Even Worse!” “...and he found out that he forgot his matches at home to light his torch. Night approached.” The next person continues the story and has to figure out a way for that problem to be overcome without using magic or unnatural methods. Someone, in this situation, could say, “He looked for two dry sticks, rubbed them together, created a spark, and lit the torch.” Another option could be, “He found a hollow tree to take shelter so he could see the path in the morning.”</p>

## Customs and Traditions of Note in Colombia:

- Keep your distance close when chatting and involve some level of physical contact (though not as much in Colombia than throughout South America)
- Talk about history, culture, or culture instead of politics or religion
- Get enough sleep so you do not yawn in public
- Be polite by not pointing two fingers in the “V for Victory” sign
- Show flexibility for punctuality and being on time

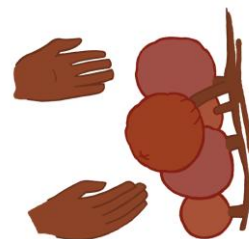


Colombia Story Games—The Gardener’s Wife	
<p><b>Oba</b></p> <p>Geared for Ages 8+</p> <p><i>Traditional game</i></p>	<p>Two or more people can play Oba as long as you have a wall and a ball. It is similar to the game "Horse" played in the United States, however, the use of a basket and basketball are not used. The winner of this game is the one to perform the most actions correctly. One person throws the ball against the wall. During the ball's travel time, players must try to catch the ball, after doing any form of movement they choose. Movements can be something like jumping on one foot, dancing, clapping your hands in the air, etc. The player throwing the ball against the wall decides which movement he or she wishes. Players who threw</p>

	the ball must catch the ball after performing their movement. Each player, in turn, throws the ball against the wall and repeats the first player's actions. The ball must be caught to complete the play. If the ball is not caught, the player must pass the ball to the next player. Play continues until another player completes the action, then catches the ball. The player who completes the turn is then the player who chooses the action to be performed.
<b>Switched!</b> Geared for Ages 5+ <i>Inspired by story  "The Gardener's  Wife"</i>	The sisters switched the babies for strange things like a dog, cat, and a stick. Now play a story game that uses the idea of switching. This can be played with two or more people. The first person starts a story with a couple lines. Then another person can call at any time, "Switched!" When called, the storyteller pauses and switches out a noun or verb in the story. For example, "Once there was a boy who had a pet dog..." "Switched!" "...had a pet elephant and could never get it to fit in the house." The next person continues the story. For a verb example, "Once there was a girl who skipped..." "Switched!" "...danced until her feet hurt."
<b>Welcome,  Family!</b> Geared for Ages 5+ <i>Inspired by story  "The Gardener's  Wife" as well as  cultural expectations</i>	Extended and immediate family members often share a home together. Due to the strong agriculture economy, all hands are needed to help. This game expands a story by adding family characters such as grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, and so forth. However, they don't have to be human. For example, one person starts a story such as "The girl headed outside to check on the squash..." Someone calls out at any time, "Welcome, Family!" Then the storyteller responds by adding a character to the story. "Then uncle llama approached the girl and said, 'Sorry for eating all the squash.'" The next person adds to the story.

## Customs and Traditions of Note with the Maasai:

- "It takes one day to destroy a house; to build a new house will take months and perhaps years. If we abandon our way of life to construct a new one, it will take thousands of years", Maasai belief.
- Elongated earlobes by women and men are respected and admired
- Tending cattle is how they live, though spare time can be filled with beading headdresses, gourds, or other items
- Warriors are celebrated and there are rigorous and dangerous rituals and ceremonies still enacted today for boys
- Women and children keep their heads shaved while the men wear their hair in long braids dyed with red clay



## Maasai Story Games—The Widow Who Gathered Sticks



<b>Sleeping Rhinoceros</b> Geared for Ages 5+ <i>Traditional game</i>	Take rocks and take turns placing the rocks onto the back of a sleeping rhinoceros. The winner is whoever placed the last rock before the rhinoceros awakes. A less dangerous version would be to play the same game with a parent pretending to asleep while two others place rocks. The parent randomly wakes up and determines the winner. For a teamwork effort, see if at least so many rocks can be placed quickly and gently before the parent awakes.
<b>Guarding the Cattle Game</b> Geared for Ages 8+ <i>Inspired by Maasai way of life</i>	The Maasai live as a seminomadic people despite the government attempting to convince them to have private land. This game is in ode to the Maasai's choice. One person tells a story. Another person says throughout, "No, that is not right!" The storyteller says, "It IS right, and here's why..." For example, the storyteller could say, "The lion prowled through the tall grass..." "No, that is not right!" "It IS right, and here's why...large paw prints can still be seen in that part of the savannah. The occasional rainwater fills these paws and provides a place to drink for many animals." By creating an answer, the storyteller successfully "guards the cattle." If there is too much pause, then the lion/government wins that round. The story continues until it feels like it has a satisfying ending.
<b>A Gathered Story</b> Geared for Ages 8+ <i>Inspired by "The Widow Who Gathered Sticks"</i>	Take at least 20 popsicle sticks and write one noun (person, place, or thing) per stick. For example, you might have "tree" on one stick and then "cattle" on another and then "old woman" on another. Mix the sticks and one person gathers 12 sticks. The other person tells the story. Whenever the gatherer places down a stick, the storyteller must include it somehow.

## Customs and Traditions of Note with the Aboriginals:

- "We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home."--Aboriginal proverb
- Avoid speaking names of the dead or showing pictures of those who have died
- Resist talking with your mother-in-law directly
- Brothers and sisters can play together until the brother has initiation
- Men help with tracking and hunting while women have skills within the bush and use digging sticks



<b>Aboriginal Story Games—Koobar the Drought-Maker</b>	
<b>Jillora</b> Geared for Ages 5+ <i>Traditional game plus a story game</i>	Take a ball about the size of a basketball (or use a basketball) and one person spins the ball on a flat surface for as long as possible. Use a timer and record the time. The next person spins the ball and times it. This could also promote teamwork by adding the spinning times of everyone there to get the record for the longest time. So at least three rounds. Post



<i>version</i>	<p>your score somewhere so you can improve on it at another time.</p> <p>Another version is to have all players spin their balls at the same time and the winner is whoever is longest. A storytelling version of this game would be for a person to time the spin and then tell a portion of a story for that amount of time. To avoid people spinning a short time on purpose, have someone else spin for the other person and that time spun would be used for telling a portion of the story.</p>
<b>Rainbow Serpent Game</b> <div>Geared for Ages 5+</div> <i>Inspired by Aboriginal values of cooperation and coexistence and well-known character</i>	<p>This game works best with three or more people as the story grows as people hang onto each other's hips to create the Rainbow Serpent, a creature who brings life to the land by bringing rain, rainbows, and abundance. The serpent lives in the deepest waterholes and shakes the earth to emerge. The first person pretends to slither and emerge from the ground and is the first part of the story. The second person, after hearing the first part of the story, hangs onto the first person's hips. The two slither while the second person adds more to the story. A third person is either more of the story or the last part of the story depending on how many people are playing. The third person hangs onto the second person's hips and so on.</p>
<b>Koobar's Story Drought</b> <div>Geared for Ages 8+</div> <i>Inspired by "Koobar the Drought-Maker"</i>	<p>One person represents Koobar, the Drought-Maker while one or more people are convincing Koobar to give rain. The people pretend to be thirsty. Each person creates a story one at a time. If a person tells a story and Koobar wants a change in the story, Koobar shakes his head. When a change is made that Koobar likes, he nods his head and the story continues. For example, "Once there was a boy who wanted to find some frogs..." Koobar shakes his head no. "...who wanted to learn how to fly..." Koobar shakes his head no. "who wanted to explore the cave he was told never to enter..." Koobar nods his head yes. "So the boy gathered a flashlight and..." The story continues. When a story is told and completed to Koobar's satisfaction, then everyone celebrates by drinking some water that "rained" as a result.</p>

## Customs and Traditions of Note with Italy:

- Show that someone is smart by taking one finger and pull gently under the eye
- First impressions are considered the only impression in Italy
- Watch your "Bella Figura" (good image) by dressing with style, crispness, and with a strong aura (confidence, demeanor, personality)
- Northern Italy tend to live with immediate family members while Southern Italy tend to live with extended family
- Facial and hand gestures are used to prove a point as well as wordy and eloquent language

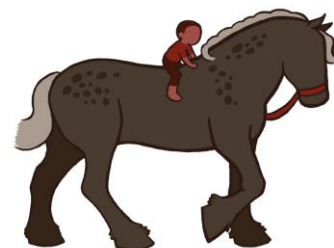


## Italy Story Games—The Traveler's Secret


<b>Morra</b> Geared for Ages 8+ <i>Traditional game</i>	Face a partner and have one hand ready by your throat. You and the partner call out a number between two and ten. There is not a “go”, simply shouting about the same time. While calling a number, you stretch one, two, three, four, or five fingers by your neck. The other person chooses either one, two, three, four, or five fingers by their neck at the same time. You add your number of fingers stretched to the number of fingers stretched of the partner. If you or your partner guessed the sum of these two numbers in the call-out, then the person guessing correctly gets a point. Decide if 4-12 points determine the ultimate winner. This game can also be played with teams.
<b>Vines</b> Geared for Ages 5+ <i>Inspired by Italian geography and economy</i>	The vineyards of Italy have shoots that twist and turn. Stories, too, can twist and turn. Have two or more people hold onto each other hips in a line. Walk and weave around the room until the front person begins a story. If someone wants to take the story in another direction—subtle or dramatic—they “grow” one of their arms into the air and then head to the front of the line. Then the other person can “grow” one of their arms into the air and take the story into another direction and take the front position. Walking and weaving is done throughout this game. When everyone has had at least one turn telling part of the story, then the game can start over with a new plot.
<b>The Big Reveal</b> Geared for Ages 10+ <i>Inspired by “The Traveler’s Secret”</i>	Before the game starts, slips of paper need to have one of these words per paper: Hero, Villain, Mentor, Good Side-Kick, Evil Side-Kick. Feel free to come up with your own categories. The cards are shuffled and each person receives a card. Everyone decides and announces what kind of character they will represent in the group story. For example, one person may want to be a magician who likes to make things fly. Another person may want to be a sailor who gets sea sick. Everyone tells the story, one at a time, introducing their characters, until all get a turn. Then, someone says, “Little did they know...” and turns over their card. If they were the magician and drew “Mentor”, then the rest of the story needs to have that character reflecting that fact. When the next person adds to the story, they also say, “Little did they know...” and turns over their card. If they were the sailor and drew “Villain”, then the rest of the story needs to have that character reflecting that fact. End the story when it feels satisfying.

## Customs and Traditions of Note with Celtic Culture:

- Celts were nomadic tribes with their own kings and rulers as opposed to having one empire or country (covering areas of Western Asia, Middle East, and much of Europe) and the Celts had such a reputation that even the Romans paid 1,000 pounds of gold to the Celts to leave Rome alone
- Known as the first Ancients to domesticate the horse and use them for all sorts of labor and entertainment 20,000 years ago



- Each tribe had its own “Barb”/storyteller and the oral tradition preserved all information due to evidence pointing to this being a non-literate society
- “Amongst the Celts the human head was venerated above all else, since the head was to the Celt the soul, centre of the emotions as well as of life itself, a symbol of divinity and of the powers of the other-world.” -Paul Jacobsthal, author of *Early Celtic Art*
- Hair was the source of strength and was grown long as a result. Loose hairs would be burned. Yet a bald man could walk the earth after death.

<b>Celtic Story Games—N’oun Doaré</b>	
<b>Caber Toss</b> Geared for Ages 10+ <i>Traditional game</i>	Normally a caber is 18 feet long weighs about 150 pounds with the narrow end being 5 inches wide while the other end is 9 inches wide. The pole is held at the narrow end and tossed so that the pole makes one flip and lands with the narrow end farthest from the thrower. To adapt for children, find a long piece of wood at least 20 pounds. Larger and heavier versions would be needed for any adults who wish to play. The story is that this game came from people tossing trees over rivers and then using the wood for items.
<b>Celtic Knots</b> Geared for Ages 8+ <i>Inspired by Celtic art and symbols</i>	Celtic artwork often shows intricate interlacing, spirals, and links. Find an intricate or simple Celtic design. Have one person trace their finger on the design while sharing a story. When the finger has returned to the starting point, another person can tell the next part of the story while tracing. The speed of the tracing is unimportant. The focus and the relaxation are more important to the telling. Feel free to draw your own artwork inspired by the Celtic designs. 
<b>“I Don’t Know” Game</b> Geared for Ages 5+ <i>Inspired by “N’oun Doaré”</i>	“N’oun Doaré” means “I don’t know” and that is what the boy responded with when asked for his name. This idea can be applied to telling a story. Sometimes the answer is not in front of us when creating a story on the spot. This game involves a storyteller and one or more people as questioners. As someone tells a story, any one of the questioners can interrupt the story and ask more about a moment in the story. For example, if the storyteller said, “The boy rode on the horse through some woods.” Someone might ask, “What was the name of the woods?” The storyteller has two choices. Either the storyteller might answer the question or turn the question by saying, “I don’t know. What do you think?” Continue the story.

## Customs and Traditions of Note with Chile:

- Avoid pointing with a hand or finger
- Acknowledge everyone individually and by title yet never say only the first name until told you can



- Keep your hands above the table or out of your pockets or you will look sneaky
- One loved Chilean comedic character is *roto chileno* who is from the lower class and lacking schooling though full of brains and strength
- The Andes Mountain Range, covering about 80% of the land, is a symbol of solitude that unifies and is a source of pride for the people

Chile Story Games—Littlebit	
<b>The King's Messenger</b> <div>Geared for Ages 8+</div> <i>Traditional game</i>	<p>With 8-12 people, you take part in a dialogue between the King's Messenger and the Colors (rest of the players are named a different color such as Blue, Green, etc.). Before beginning, everyone learns the dialogue—</p> <p>K.M.: I have come to say that the king has lost a gold ring and the _____ (name of color) has it.</p> <p>Color Named: I, my Lord?</p> <p>K.M.: Yes, my Lord.</p> <p>C.N.: No, my Lord.</p> <p>K.M.: Then who has it?</p> <p>C.N.: _____ (name of another color) has it.</p> <p>The dialogue is repeated until all Colors have a turn. Once the game starts, "mistakes" such as hesitating too long or forgetting words could lead to forfeits, a common practice enjoyed amongst Latin Americans. Forfeits are done at the end when either all the Colors made mistakes or at least a certain number have made mistakes. The King's Messenger, as he acts on behalf of the imaginary King, determines the forfeits. For example, a forfeit could be someone sings a song backwards, acts out a goofy scene, or makes silly faces while saying something serious. Often people want to earn forfeits as this is the most entertaining part of the game. Use your imagination!</p>
<b>Anti-Poetry Stories</b> <div>Geared for Ages 10+</div> <i>Inspired by Chilean literary technique</i>	<p>Two Chilean poets, Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, received Nobel Prizes in Literature. Both delved in the prose-like technique of anti-poetry. Everyday items or ideas become large. Flowery language is discouraged while sayings of the day are celebrated. Use these concepts in creating a narrative anti-poem. Write slang words or names of everyday items on slips of paper. Choose 1-2 slips. For example, if you drew "toaster" and the saying "flamed—meaning to take something too seriously" then an anti-poem could be, "Oh, toaster! How you concentrate to such degree—high degree—that all is flamed about you. When bread came upon you, no cold shoulder did you bare. Rather, the anger ignited and burnt toast lay upon the plate."</p>
<b>Littlebit, Littlebit, what can you do?</b> <div>Geared for Ages 5+</div> <i>Inspired by</i>	<p>Someone represents Littlebit by holding a pinky finger up. That person hops Littlebit (pinky) into the room/store and asks for something outrageous. A person says, "You can't lift ____." An example could be, "You can't lift an elephant." Littlebit responds, "Yes, I can. I will show you." Then Littlebit acts out with facial expressions and body language something like the following, "I call for some monkeys, who</p>

<b>“Littlebit”</b>	carry rope, tie around the elephant, give me the rope, and I lift the elephant on my back.” People switch roles.
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## Customs and Traditions of Note with Cuba:

- Cubans like to point by puckering their lips in the intended direction
- A wrinkled or scrunched nose means “Huh?” or “What?”
- Conversation volume is loud with huge facial expressions and hand gestures
- You can interrupt someone talking and still have good manners
- Arriving late for appointments or parties is a common practice



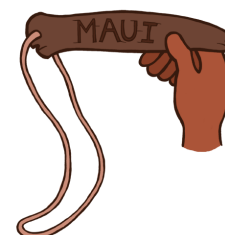
Cuba Story Games—The Charcoal Woman’s Son							
<b>The Dogs and the Chickens</b> Geared for Ages 8+ <i>Traditional game plus a story game version</i>	<p>Everyone needs the name of a city. Review Cuban cities or choose other cities. One person starts by saying, “In _____ (name of city) the dogs crow and the chickens bark.” Whoever has the named city responds, “No, sir, in _____ (name of another city) the dogs do not crow and the chickens do not bark. Where the dogs crow and the chickens bark is in _____ (name of another city).” Replies must be fast and accurate or the stumbling person pays a forfeit determined by the group. A forfeit could be someone sings a song backwards, acts out a goofy scene, or makes silly faces while saying something serious. To further this game, have the group tell the story of how a city came to have crowing dogs and barking chickens. For another round, you could change the phrase to something like “In _____ the trees float and the clouds sag.”</p> <p><i>Here are some of the biggest Cuban cities:</i></p> <table> <tr> <td>Havana</td><td>Holquin</td></tr> <tr> <td>Santiago de Cuba</td><td>Guantánamo</td></tr> <tr> <td>Camagüey</td><td>Santa Clara</td></tr> </table>	Havana	Holquin	Santiago de Cuba	Guantánamo	Camagüey	Santa Clara
Havana	Holquin						
Santiago de Cuba	Guantánamo						
Camagüey	Santa Clara						
<b>The Lone Cow and the Marabu</b> Geared for Ages 5+ <i>Inspired by Cuban enjoyment of song games</i>	<p>Cuba used to have as many cows as people, but now there are so few cows that you must have government permission to eat a cow. Agriculture suffers as unused fields fill with a thorny bush call marabu. For this game, everyone sits in a circle with one person as the “Lone Cow” while all else are Marabu. Sing your own tune of “Roam, roam, through my home. Where has all my food gone?” The Lone Cow quickens and slows the singing, but when he says “gone”, then he must pat one of the Marabu on the head. The chosen Marabu chases the Lone Cow around the circle while the Lone Cow tries to run around the circle at least once and take that empty spot. If the Lone Cow makes it, then the cow is fed. If the Marabu touches the Lone Cow, then the cow goes hungry and that Marabu becomes the Lone Cow. Repeat.</p>						
<b>Mystery Sign-Solver</b> Geared for Ages 10+	<p>There was mystery with the meaning of the noblewoman’s sign “What God Made, I Destroyed”. For this game, one person creates a 5-7-word phrase, writes it on a piece of paper, and shows it to 2+ people. Give the</p>						



<p><i>Inspired by “The Charcoal Woman’s Son”</i></p>	<p>people 3-5 minutes to make-up a short story behind it and each share with the group. An example could be a phrase, “Fresh fish can still stink.” All the others decide the meaning/story of this sign. One person’s story could be about a fish that was swept ashore. Another person may create a story of a store owner who refused to sell anything stinky, etc. The Sign-Maker awards 5 points to the favorite story. Rotate who is the Sign-Maker and go for a pre-determined number of rounds. Most points wins.</p>
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## Customs and Traditions of Note with Polynesian:

- Avoid making a “V for Victory” sign with the palm inward (though outward could be too close to the offensive gesture) or being too animated or boisterous in voice and manner
- Sing a song from your native land to show gratitude to someone of the Maori people, the indigenous Polynesians
- Pressing noses is how the Maori people say hello
- Many people enjoy ocean-centered activities as everyone is within 75 miles from the water
- New Zealanders become upset when they are spoken of in the same breath as the Australians as if they were the same countries



Polynesian Story Games—The Magic Fish Hook	
<p><b>Free-Form Lawn Bowling</b></p> <p>Geared for Ages 5+</p> <p><i>Traditional game</i></p>	<p>Take two balls of equal size (larger makes for easier game) and play outside with two people. The first person rolls a ball in any direction. Then the second person stands in the same place and tries to hit the first person’s ball. From now on, the first person starts his roll wherever the first ball stops while the second person starts his roll wherever the second ball stops. A hit equals 1 point. As soon as one of the balls is hit, the game starts over. The first person to 5 points wins. Several two-player games could be played at once.</p>
<p><b>Steam and Smoke, a Maori Feast</b></p> <p>Geared for Ages 8+</p> <p><i>Inspired by traditional and adaptive nature of Maori cooking</i></p>	<p>A Maori Feast using Hangi or “Earth Oven” involves wet steam and smoke for the flavorful experience without frying or baking. The Maori also adapted from the Pakeha (fair-skinned people) way of cooking. In this game, everyone pretends to prepare a feast and dig a square pit, start a fire, lay down rocks, and then stack wood like pallets to crisscross on top of each other. When sitting around the Earth Oven, someone says, “We have steam and smoke.” Another says, “Then what should we cook?” If you have two people playing, then the first person responds, “Something _____ (descriptive word).” Otherwise, the individual responding would be the next person in the circle. The partner/next person must respond within 10 seconds of what could be eaten-imaginary or real-that shares that descriptive word. If too much time passes, then that person must run around the Earth Oven, sit down, and say, “I could not find anything _____.” Everyone pretends to be</p>

	hungry. If someone said, “Something smooth.” Another would say, “Then let’s cook that smooth snake.” Eat whatever was decided. Take turns.
<b>Fishing for Islands</b> <div>Geared for Ages 5+</div> <i>Inspired by “The Magic Fish Hook”</i>	<p>One person, the Fisher, stands at one side of the room and pretends to cast the magic hook into the other people, the Islands. The Fisher must cast the line with eyes closed or blindfolded. The Islands shuffle.</p> <p>Whatever direction the Fisher casts the line, the closest person in that direction is the caught Island. That person disguises their voice and makes a long groan due to being caught. The Fisher guesses the name of who was caught. If guessed, then the Island surfaces and the Fisher can do a victory whoop. If mistaken, then the Island stays underwater. The Islands shuffle about and the Fisher pretends to cast the magic hook again. When finally caught, that Island becomes the new Fisher.</p>

## Customs and Traditions of Note with Egypt:

- New actions are often resisted that lead to uncertainty or change
- Extend greeting time beyond a simple acknowledgement
- Most people dislike saying “no” and find other ways to answer as “no”
- Avoid direct eye contact and touching with other gender unless family
- Resist rudeness by pointing with your foot (toe, heel, sole of shoes)



## Egypt Story Games—The Wanderings of Isis

### Senet

Geared for Ages 10+

#### Traditional game

#### Senet Sticks White Pieces

Dice Sticks	Spaces
All 4 white	6
3 white, 1 black	1
2 white, 2 black	Lose turn
1 white, 3 black	Lose turn
All black	4













#### Black Pieces

Senet the most popular board game for Ancient Egypt. Through the ages, the rules are not exact though close enough to play. Either the board could be beautifully built or scratched in the earth. Draw the following table:

➡	⬅	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	➡
		20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	
➡		21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	

Make five ⬅ and five ➡ out of paper for the playing pieces. Place the pieces as seen on the drawn table above. Player One is ➡ while Player Two is ⬅ and represents the God Seth. Take four popsicle sticks and decorate one side white and the other side black. Player One tosses the four sticks like dice.

1. Choose to move one of your pieces after discovering the number of spaces you can move after tossing the Senet sticks. As shown by the arrows above, the top row moves left to right, the middle row moves right to left, and the bottom row moves left to right.
2. You can move onto any empty square or any undefended enemy piece. A piece is defended if it is side-by-side in a row with at least one other of the same players' pieces. You may jump over any number of pieces.
3. If your piece lands on an undefended enemy piece, the pieces swap places. Squares 26, 27, and 28 are safe and pieces cannot be swapped.

<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Dice Sticks</th><th>Spaces</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>All 4 white</td><td>4</td></tr> <tr> <td>3 white, 1 black</td><td>Lose turn</td></tr> <tr> <td>2 white, 2 black</td><td>Lose turn</td></tr> <tr> <td>1 white, 3 black</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td>All black</td><td>6</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Dice Sticks	Spaces	All 4 white	4	3 white, 1 black	Lose turn	2 white, 2 black	Lose turn	1 white, 3 black	1	All black	6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You must move the entire distance of your throw, and must try first to move forward. If you cannot move forward, you must move back. Otherwise, you pass.</li> <li>You must have an exact throw to move onto the House of Happiness (Square 26). You must stop on the House of Happiness on your way to the last Houses; you may not pass it by.</li> <li>You can move from the House of Happiness to one of the last Houses on any throw. Squares 26, 27, and 28 are safe</li> <li>You cannot move back from one of the last Houses, if you have no forward moves. If these are your only remaining pieces, you must 'Pass'.</li> <li>To take a piece off the board, move one space beyond Square 30 for 'Out'. You must have an exact throw to move to 'Out' from one of the last five Houses.</li> <li>The first player to move all their pieces off the board and 'Out' is the winner.</li> </ol>
Dice Sticks	Spaces												
All 4 white	4												
3 white, 1 black	Lose turn												
2 white, 2 black	Lose turn												
1 white, 3 black	1												
All black	6												
<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td></td><td>House of Happiness</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>House of Water</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>House of the Three Truths-must go 3 spaces</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>House of the Re-Atoum-must go 2 spaces</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		House of Happiness		House of Water		House of the Three Truths-must go 3 spaces		House of the Re-Atoum-must go 2 spaces	<p>Along the 4,000-mile Nile River, Egypt was divided into Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt until King Menes (a.k.a. King Namer) from Upper Egypt conquered Lower Egypt and stopped the fighting around 3000 BCE.</p> <p><b>Each land has its own symbols—</b></p> <p><b>Upper Egypt</b> = “Up River”, Vulture, White Crown, Nile River rapids to Memphis</p> <p><b>Lower Egypt</b> = “Down River”, Cobra, Red Crown, Memphis to Mediterranean Sea</p> <p>King Menes created a double crown, red and white, and ruled The Two Lands. For this game, half of the people are Cobras and stand on one side of the room and the other half of the people are Vultures and stand on the opposite side. You need at least one Cobra and one Vulture with a third person representing King Menes who stands in the center. Set up boundaries that are no bigger than a living room. The Cobras run/slither to the Vulture side while the Vultures run/fly to the Cobra side. Gestures are encouraged. They avoid King Menes. If King Menes touches Cobra or Vulture, then that person holds hands with King Menes. Now those two people reach out to grab Cobras and Vultures. The line with King Menes grows until all are together. King Menes proclaims, “Two Lands are One!” Switch roles.</p>				
	House of Happiness												
	House of Water												
	House of the Three Truths-must go 3 spaces												
	House of the Re-Atoum-must go 2 spaces												
<p><b>Scorpion Scuttle</b></p> <p>Geared for Ages 8+</p> <p><i>Inspired by “The Wanderings of Isis”</i></p>	<p>This game is best with at least five people (three to be Scorpions, one as Isis/Horus, and one as Seth). Extra people can be more Scorpions and/or to have an Iris and a Horus. The Scorpions stand in a circle facing out around Isis/Horus. Seth tries to reach into the circle and tag Isis/Horus. The Scorpions must stay in a circle at all times and can only side-step/scuttle. They can raise or lower arms/pinchers or lift a leg/stinger but only with the other foot planted. These are fast gestures and are not violent. If Seth gets touched seven times by the Scorpions, then Isis and Horus are safe. If Seth tags Isis or Horus within five minutes, then Seth wins. Switch roles.</p>												



## Customs and Traditions of Note with First Nations Canada:

- More than 500 nations are part of First Nations with different traditions
- North America is divided into regions of tribes, with the Northwest—the likely location of the story “The Boy of the Red Sky” and home to over 30 tribes—as the shorelines by the Pacific Ocean in Canada/United States
- All these Northwest tribes depend on fish and shellfish, especially salmon
- Wood could be stripped from the sometimes 300-foot-tall-and-35-feet-in-circumference giants without chopping and thereby keeping the trees alive
- Wash twice before eating and do not drink anything at the table



First Nations Canada Story Games—The Boy of the Red Sky	
<b>Chance</b> <div>Geared for Ages 5+</div> <i>Traditional game</i>	<p>Almost every tribe plays games of chance. Instead of using deer bone, cut out five circles out of cardstock or cardboard. Draw two bears on two circles (one side only). Then draw three eagles on the remaining three circles (one side only). Take turns tossing the five circles. You get no points for each blank, one point for each bear, and two points for each eagle. Total your throw. Take turns tossing. The first person to 50 points wins.</p>
<b>Potlatch</b> <div>Geared for Ages 8+</div> <i>Inspired by traditional feasting and gift-giving of the Northwest</i>	<p>Most tribes of the Northwest hold grand feasts and gift-giving to the invited guests called potlatches. This tradition maintains or increases a social standing. The longer that the potlatch host can feed and give gifts, the more respect is given. In this game, see how long you can keep a story going with stumbling or pausing too long complete with “food” and “gifts”. A person begins the story by with any scene or characters as desired. The other people can ask for “food” or a “gift”. The storyteller responds, “What do you wish?” and the person says what kind of food or gift is wanted. This is the only time the story can pause. Once the food or gift is identified, then the storyteller must continue the story within 10 seconds. A food item is something added to the story that suggests action. So if the listeners would like the plot to move along, then they demand food. A gift is a character or power that could help the main character(s) in the story. For example, if the storyteller said, “The boy looked out across the lake and fell asleep.” A listener could shout, “Food!” Then the storyteller might respond with, “But the boy felt a sting, jumped up and ran into the water.” If a listener said, “Gift!” Then the storyteller could say, “The boy had not seen who had stung him, but from the bushes, a rabbit hopped out and said, ‘I saw it. I can tell you who did it.’” The storyteller continues the story until pausing too long or runs out of ideas. Rotate tellers. Time each story to determine who had the longest potlatch.</p>
<b>Storm-Summoning</b> <div>Geared for Ages 5+</div> <i>Inspired by “The Boy of the Red Sky”</i>	<p>To represent the coat worn by the adoptive mother, take a blanket for this game. One person tells a story, at least one other person waits to jump in to tell part of the story, and another person wears a blanket. The listener(s) jump in to continue the story when the person rustles the blanket. If two people are waiting to jump in and continue the story, then the first person who speaks gets to be the storyteller. However, if no one jumps in to tell the story within 5 seconds, then the storm brews and the person with the blanket can blow wind and tickle everyone with the storm. Rotate roles.</p>

## APPENDIX G

### International Adoption Statistics

International adoptions are on the rise and have tripled in number of placements from 7,093 placements in the United States to 22,884 in 2004 due to increased infertility rates, disgruntled couples thinking the private domestic process is too slow, the disinclination to do foster care, and the devastation of war in foreign countries. From the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP), we learn that while 171 countries place children in the United States, 20 of these countries fulfill 91.96% of these placements (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar & The Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2006; National Center for Health Statistics, n.d.). The United States Bureau of Consular Affairs updates statistics on intercountry adoptions and noted that China has led in placements except for the year 2008 when Guatemala had 4,112 and China had 3,912. For 2011, China had 2,587 while Guatemala's numbers dropped to zero due to infringed adoption laws by the Guatemalan process, thus causing blocked placements to this day. The number of inter-country adoptions made in the United States from 1999-2011 was 233,934. More adoptions are welcomed into the United States than any other country. When considering adoptions before 1999 to present, about 2% of the entire United States population is adoptees—domestic and international. (U.S. Department of State, Office of Children's Issues, n.d., p.3).

For the NSAP, information was gathered between April 2007 and July 2008 and included 2,089 adoptive parents with 545 children adopted internationally, 763 children adopted from Foster Care, and 781 placed through private agencies. The three primary ways to adopt are: internationally with 444,000 placements at 25% of adoption types, private domestic adoptions with 677,000 placements at 38% of adoption types, and foster care adoptions with 661,000

placements at 37% of adoption types. The public can access the vast information through the National Center for Health Statistics at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/slaitnsap.htm>.

I created a table with information gathered from the United States Bureau of Consular Affairs with the top 20 countries with adoption placements in America from 1999-2011. The sections are color-coded by continent with Asia as red, Europe as orange, Africa as blue, South America as green, and North America as yellow. Six out of ten international adoptees come from Asia with 33% of that number from China (Vandivere et al., 2009).

Country	Placements	Continent
China	66,630	Asia
Russia	45,112	Asia
Guatemala	29,731	South America
South Korea	18,605	Asia
Ethiopia	11,524	Africa
Ukraine	8,889	Europe
Kazakhstan	6,421	Asia
India	4,979	Asia
Colombia	3,568	South America
Philippines	3,005	Asia
Romania	2,945	Europe
Haiti	2,740	South America
Cambodia	2,355	Asia
Taiwan	1,884	Asia
Liberia	1,436	Africa
Bulgaria	1,416	Europe
Poland	1,057	Europe
Mexico	1,023	North America
Nigeria	962	Africa
Thailand	846	Asia

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